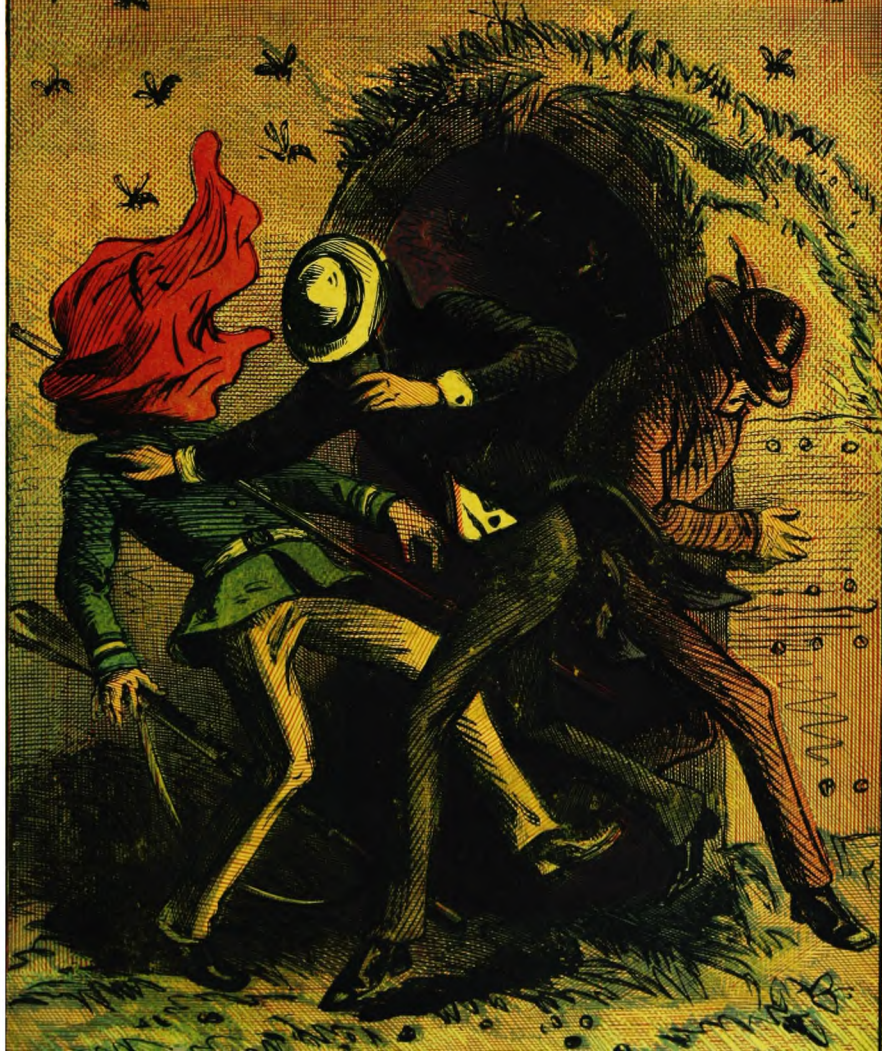


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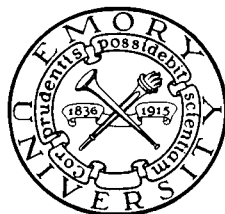
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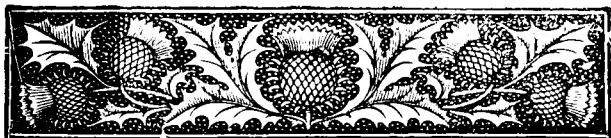
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OUR WIDOW

AND OTHER TALES.

OUR WIDOW.



HONESTLY believe that there breathes no human creature in the enjoyment of a thousand a year and upwards with a greater sense of respectability than myself. I mention the income, because the richer one is, the more temptation there seems to be in some cases to set respectability at defiance. It is understood to be a virtue of the middle rather than of the upper classes. The best society, I am afraid, is a little inclined to pooh-pooh it; the Fitz-Joneses term it conventionalism, and agree that it is very necessary to be attended to by the plain Joneses, but as for themselves, they can afford to 'do things.' And such 'things' as they do do! I more especially refer to the female Fitz-Joneses. Those picnic riding-parties to Richmond, for instance, where they don't meet their chaperons until *after* they get to the *Castle* or the *Star and Garter*. Such is my sense of propriety, that I really don't think I could have joined one of those expeditions even in

my worst bachelor-days. The 'accidental' meetings in the Row, again, of the same persons, would have been to my mind simply shocking. If such were my feelings before my Julia became Mrs. Starch Primmer, you may imagine that I *now* regard all these goings on with even severer reprobation. Julia herself protests that I am too severe, and sometimes twits me with it in her affectionate and charming way. At the club, I know I am set down as a consummate hypocrite by Major Tattel and others of that wicked set; but to all their gibes I am accustomed to reply calmly: 'Jeer on, sons of Frivolity; I am content to be upon Virtue's side, even though I be there alone'—or words to that effect.

In a word, until April last, there was not a more well-conducted head of a family—a phrase I take from the Census-paper, for dearest Julia and myself have not been blessed with children—in all Belgravia than your humble servant, nor one that felt more confident of keeping his good name. In the month of March, however, arrived our widow from India. She had a double claim upon the hospitality of the house of Starch Primmer; for she had been my wife's bosom-friend at school; and — and ——Well, she might at one time have been Mrs. Starch Primmer, but for circumstances over which *I* at least had no control. She had chosen to prefer Mulligar Tawney of the Burrampooter Irregular Cavalry, with his notoriety and swagger and debts, to my humble self. Heaven knows I did not blame her. I had my own opinion, however, of Mulligar Tawney, which was fully justified by what subsequently took place. His constitution, originally of iron, had shown symptoms of giving way, before his return to India; when he got there, it broke down. High play in 'the Hills,' whither he went to 'set himself up,' as the wretch called it (he was full of slang), emptied his pocket, or rather hers, poor thing—for he never had a five-pound note of his own—and brandy pawnee finished the work which bitter beer had begun. When a man once stoops to folly of any sort—as I have more than once observed—there is no knowing where he will find himself eventually. I

make it a rule always to speak with charity of the dead, but Tawney was a brute in spurs. I repeat, I do not blame Clementina—Tina I used to call her at one time, so that you may be sure, with my strict notions of propriety, that the affair had advanced some distance—but how she *could* have allied herself with that hairy ruffian will always be a marvel to me. It was wrong of her to confide to a mutual friend—who not only repeated it to myself, but to others—that I was a ‘muff;’ but I have forgiven her even that. And when she just now returned to her native land, I am sure there was no old friend more ready to welcome her—I don’t say with open arms, because our positions precluded anything of that sort now, and the very metaphor would be reprehensible—more ready to welcome her to hearth and home than Augustus Starch Primmer.

Of course our previous mutual relation rendered her coming excessively embarrassing, not to *her* indeed, as it turned out, but to *me*, and I seriously consulted my wife upon the propriety of locating our widow in the neighbouring hotel. But Julia said—I thought at the time a little testily, but the dear creature was suffering from brow-ague: ‘My dear Augustus, fiddle-de-dee; you are as prudish as Miss Forté Somers. If *I* don’t mind dear Clementina’s coming, you certainly need have no objection. With this tic about me, I could not go out even so far as the *Grosvenor*. She must be our guest, of course, and I do hope you will make her visit as pleasant as you can; for unless I get better, I can take her nowhere.’

‘Take her, my dear! You surely would not have me escort Mrs. Mulligar Tawney *alone* anywhere?’

‘Well, that’s as *she* likes, Augustus. If *she* doesn’t mind, and *I* don’t mind, *you* surely need have no objection. Indian life is so different; and Captain Tawney was so queer, by all accounts, that I dare say we shall find her less conventional——’

‘My darling, I don’t like that word,’ interrupted I gravely.

‘When I have the brow-ague, Mr. Starch Primmer, I take the first word that comes.’

Perceiving that dearest Julia had understood my meaning, though without yielding to its force, I argued the matter no further, but braced myself up for the trying moment when Clementina and I were to meet for the first time after an interval during which our lines of life had so diverged. I stayed away from the City the whole day on which she was expected, for I was in that tremor that I felt unable to attend to business; and when I saw from the drawing-room window the three cabs arrive, the roofs whereof bore Clementina's wardrobe, and in one of which she was, I am sure if there had been a back-door to the house, I should have made my escape upon the instant. There was a roaring in my ears, such as takes place when one keeps one's head too long under water, and the next thing I heard distinctly was: 'Why, 'Gus, dear, don't you know me?'

And there was Clementina Mulligar Tawney with both her hands outstretched for mine, and looking as bewitching as ever. She was altered, of course, but by no means for the worse. Her delicate cheeks had taken a tinge of brown from the eastern sun, which did not misbecome them; her crisp brown hair was as luxuriant as ever, and her blue eyes as lustrous; she had but undergone a sort of fairy change, which had transformed her from a blonde to a brunette. But she was a girl no longer: her attitude and manner were those of one accustomed to be obeyed; her voice, although low and clear, was very incisive, and its ring gave me great satisfaction, for it convinced me that that man in the Burrampooters had not had it all his own way. I repeated a few formal phrases, which I had prepared for this dreaded interview, and then Clementina swept away to embrace her 'own sweet Julia,' who was upon the sofa in her boudoir sipping quinine. The rapidity of our widow's movements, considering her Indian experience, was bewildering; while her conversation reminded me of nothing so much as an exhibition of fireworks. My ideas were dreadfully upset by the whole transaction, but that which was uppermost was, that she had called me 'Gus, and would probably do it again. Why, even dearest Julia had never ventured

short of Augustus. I hoped that this demonstrative female did not expect that I should return to 'Tina.'

As time went on, and my wife's 'tic' with it—as though it were the pendulum—Mrs. Mulligar Tawney began, as I had apprehended, to find Buckram Terrace exceedingly slow. She was a widow, and rather a recent one, but as she told me herself, with an epigrammatic force which I am unable to convey, she had left the country of Sutte, and did not intend to sacrifice herself to her husband's memory. Dearest Mulligar having fallen a victim to the climate of that dreadful country, was a circumstance she could never forget, but it was flying in the face of Providence to refuse to take a little relaxation. The suggestion of a little stroll through the Museum of South Kensington (where one sees nobody but scientific people, who are rarely scandal-bearers) was received with a ringing laugh.

'Thank you very much, 'Gus; but I don't care for museums. You need not trouble yourself either to propose attending a May meeting in Exeter Hall, which I perceive you have in your mind [which was perfectly true]. What I want, as my own sweet Julia's kindness has already detected, is a little lark of some sort. She says you have plenty of money, and that I may do just what I like with you. No, look here, 'Gus: the weather is charming: you shall take me down to Richmond, and give me a treat at the *Star and Garter*. There!'

'No, *not* there,' returned I emphatically, while the perspiration came out upon my forehead in three distinct rows of beads. 'Mrs. Mulligar——'

'Call me Clementina,' interrupted she with a bewitching smile, 'or else I shall positively think it wrong to call you 'Gus. The idea of there being anything wrong between dear old Starch Primmer and anybody!' And then she laughed in a manner which I cannot but characterise as forward.

'As for my age, Clementina,' returned I gravely, 'I regret for many reasons that I am not able to arrest the progress of time——'

'There, now, I have vexed you,' cried Clementina with

her blue eyes swimming in tears ; ‘you who are so good and kind. I won’t ask to go anywhere, I’m sure. It’s quite enough for a lone widow like me to be offered a hospitable roof, without having little treats at the Stut-tut-tar and Gug-gug-garter.’

‘Dearest Tina,’ cried I, shocked beyond expression (and even propriety) by this method of putting the matter, ‘I assure you, if I was not so occupied every day in the City, nothing would give me——’

‘Why not go then on a Sus-sus-Sunday?’ sobbed the irrepressible widow. ‘I am sure there is no harm in enjoying upon that day the trees, the green fields, and wh-wh-whitebait.’

‘Pray, pray, don’t cry, Mrs.—Clementina, I mean : you shall go wherever you like,’ exclaimed I despairingly ; for if she had gone on like that another minute, I believe I should have cried too.

‘*Next* Sunday, then,’ rejoined the widow from behind her pocket-handkerchief : ‘is that a promise, ‘Gus?’

‘Yes,’ groaned I ; ‘that is, if it’s fine,’ for I knew the barometer was falling.

‘Then I’ve won six pair of gloves,’ cried Clementina, clapping her hands, ‘for Julia bet me half-a-dozen to one that I should never get you to do it.’ And with that, her red petticoat flashed up stairs, and immediately afterwards peals of laughter from the two conspirators rang out from the boudoir.

The remainder of the week, my mind was occupied with meteorology, and aspirations for the fine weather to break up. But on Saturday, the gentleman in charge of that department in my newspaper foretold immediate tempests, and I felt that my doom was sealed. I knew that the next morning would show an unclouded sky. It would be painful to me to describe in detail my endeavours to mitigate the force of public opinion before I started with our widow upon that unparalleled expedition. How I remarked unceasingly before the butler that I had known Clementina ever since she was *so* high, and considered myself to be her second father ; for I felt that an explanation, if not an apology, was due to so respectable

a household as our own. By ordering the brougham at ten o'clock, I had been in hopes that the more charitable of my neighbours would imagine that our widow and myself were going to some place of worship at a great distance, such as St. Paul's; but that was a plan she would not hear of.

'I go in a hansom, my dear 'Gus, or I don't go at all,' observed she with decision. 'The idea of being "stived up" in a close carriage on such a lovely day as this! In a hansom, and through Richmond Park——'

'Julia!' interrupted I, in an agony, appealing to my wife, still martyred by her tic, for rescue, 'do speak to her, instead of laughing in that foolish way, which is certain to make your head worse. Do tell her how contrary to propriety it is—how quite out of the question——'

'My dear Augustus,' responded Julia, with all the gravity she could muster, but not without a malicious twinkle in her eyes, 'I think it will do you both all the good in the world. After being moped so long in a sick house, a little expedition of pleasure is just what you want; and as for dear Clementina, she has set her heart upon the hansom, I know.'

Deserted by my natural protectress, there was nothing for it but to submit to the relentless widow; and five minutes afterwards we were being whirled down Buckram Terrace in the wished-for vehicle, yet not so rapidly as to escape the censorious comments of the inhabitants.

Where could Mr. Starch Primmer be going to at such a pace with that young woman, just when everybody else was going to church?

'I protest I have not felt so jolly,' exclaimed Clementina with enthusiasm, 'since poor dear Mulligar fell a victim to that dreadful climate.'

It was not till we got to Hammersmith Bridge that I began to recover myself, or was able to make any effort to be agreeable to my fair companion. 'Here,' said I, 'is where the university boat-race took place last month.'

'What! and you never brought me to see it,' cried our widow with mock-indignation. 'Oh you wicked, wicked

man!’ and she tapped my arm with her parasol, in a manner that expressed she had forgiven me nevertheless.

‘Sorry to interrupt,’ exclaimed a dreadful voice immediately over our heads, ‘but which gate of the park are you agoin’ in at?’

I could not have replied, even if I had known what to say, which I did not. A half-formed resolution of throwing this eaves-dropper into the river, flashed across my brain, but I could decide upon nothing. I had only one determination, and that was of blood to the head.

‘The Robbin ’Ood gate is as good as any,’ continued the driver; ‘only they don’t let ’ansoms in at no gates, only private carridges.’

‘There,’ cried I, ‘Clementina; you see what comes of taking this sort of vehicle. ’Pon my word, I think we had better go back again.’

‘Not a bit on it, Sir; you need not disappoint the young lady,’ resumed this wretch confidentially. ‘*I* can manage it, bless you, if you’ll only leave it to me.’

And with that, he shut down the trap, and I could hear him chuckling to himself outside in a way which, to say the least of it, was anything but respectful.

Clementina was in such convulsions of laughter that I could get her to listen to nothing serious, so we drove on in silence over Barnes Common, and by a number of respectable houses, the occupants of which, issuing forth to church in family procession, regarded us with a sort of malevolent pity. Presently the driver pulled up in front of a roadside inn—not an ivy-covered hostelry such as we associate with early hours and pastoral habits, but a regular public-house, such as might have come out into the country for the day from Whitechapel—and demanded a glass of beer and a hammer.

‘How dare you stop at this dreadful place?’ cried I, dashing at the trap-door with my umbrella; but the ferule went into space, for the man had already descended, and thereby escaped impalement. Then there was a terrible knocking at the back of the cab, and presently a shout of triumph. ‘There, I’ve been and took the number off, and now we’re a private vehicle,’ explained the driver

coming round to the front and exhibiting the tin badge by way of trophy; 'and if the old woman don't let us through, why, then, I'll drive over her.'

And we very nearly did drive over her. She made an ineffectual attempt to shut the gate in our faces, and although our Jehu shouted out: 'It's the gentleman's own carriage; don't you see it aint got a number on?' it is my belief she would have done it, but that he got our horse's head in, and the wheels followed perforce. If the ranger ever gives pensions to those park-servants who almost perish in the performance of their duties, I am sure he owes one to that heroic female. I never felt so hot, or so altogether ashamed of myself, as during that frightful altercation, during which I remained quite passive; but a mile and a half of the fresh air of the forest revived me mightily, and when Clementina suggested a little walking, I assented with cheerfulness. We sent the hansom on to the inn, with instructions to call for us after our early dinner; and having thus severed our connection with that disreputable vehicle, I felt that I could almost enjoy myself. How exquisite was the woodland scene; how musical the voices of the birds, and how altogether enjoyable the leafy sol——, no, *not* solitude. The idea of Richmond Park being a pleasant lounge in that sort of weather, had apparently struck other Londoners beside ourselves. I say Londoners, because Pall Mall was written very legibly upon most of them, and especially on a couple of old fogies sauntering up directly towards us, and poisoning the balmy air with the smoke of their cigars. The next instant, I would have taken my own risk in an earthquake if it had only swallowed up for certain one of those two men. I shut my eyes so tight that I saw sparks, but not before I had seen Tattel of the *Megatherium*, and felt sure that the recognition had been mutual.

'Did you know that old gentleman?' asked Clementina carelessly, when they had passed by.

'Yes,' said I with assumed calmness; 'but I don't like him. I had no intention of speaking to him.'

'He seemed rather to avoid *us*,' remarked the widow.

‘Yes,’ returned I ; ‘the dislike is mutual.’ But well I knew that, though the major was too discreet to speak to me just then, I should hear enough of that meeting of ours when I next went to the club.

The wretch kept dogging us for two hours, and engaged a table in our immediate vicinity in the saloon at the *Star and Garter*, for it may easily be imagined that I was not going, under the circumstances, to take a private sitting-room. I could hear him laughing in his horrid cynical manner, and repeating to his friend my phrase about ‘preferring to be on Virtue’s side, and alone;’ and I never enjoyed a good dinner so little in all my life.

While our widow was putting on her cloak, I went up and shook hands with him.

‘That’s a friend of my wife,’ said I carelessly—‘a charming person.’

‘She looks that,’ observed the major significantly. ‘Mrs. Starch Primmer is not with you, I presume.’

‘No,’ said I quietly. ‘The fact is, we have got separated from our party.’

I am not sure that this observation—though I made it with the best intentions—was consonant with my general devotion to truth. But what was I to say to a man like Tattel, and at so short a notice? It would have taken an hour and a half to have satisfactorily explained our widow.

‘Ah, indeed,’ responded he coolly ; ‘how unfortunate ! But it often happens to this crowded hotel.’

It was early, and there was not a soul in that enormous coffee-room beside ourselves.

Almost immediately after Clementina’s return, the waiter, who had had his orders, came to inform us that our carriage was at the door. As we left the room, I saw Tattel rush to a window which looked out into the road. I afterwards heard his voice remarking above our heads : ‘So, you see, the whole party must have come in a hansom.’

Plunged in melancholy, I sat silent in that horrid vehicle. The unsuspecting Clementina, on the contrary, was in the highest spirits.

‘How dearest Mulligar, if that dreadful climate had but spared him, would have enjoyed a day like this! Now, be sure, ‘Gus, we walk through Kew Gardens; Julia arranged the whole plan for me before we started. The hansom drops us at this end of them, and meets us afterwards at the grand entrance. How thirsty that sauce *à la Tartare* has made me. I should so like an orange.’

As we walked through those splendid grounds, thronged with ten thousand holiday-makers, she demanded this vulgar fruit with such pertinacity, that I was tempted to break into the orangery, and pluck her one off the tree. At the Kew entrance, there were five hundred vehicles of all descriptions; but our peculiar hansom—red with yellow wheels—was apparent at the first glance.

‘Home,’ cried I—‘home!’ in a voice of pathetic earnestness.

‘But stop at the first place you come to where there are oranges,’ added Clementina.

Before the yellow wheels had made half-a-dozen revolutions, they were arrested in front of the stall of an itinerant trader. Upon two planks over an empty barrel were displayed, in luscious profusion, ginger-beer, slices of cocoa-nut, penny whistles, toffy, wooden dolls, and ORANGES. The enormous carriage traffic had to be delayed in that crowded place, while I leaped down amid jeers, and seized upon half-a-dozen of the wished-for delicacies. In my hurry and confusion, I forgot to pay for them, and was pursued by the proprietress of the establishment with shocking outcries. In my alarm and shame, I threw her half-a-sovereign instead of sixpence, and then sunk back in a sort of stupor.

Before I recovered myself, Clementina had got through all the oranges, and pronounced herself refreshed.

We were already in the neighbourhood of Belgravia, and it was some comfort to think that nobody we now met need have a suspicion that we had come from such a place as Kew Gardens; and yet such is the power of conscience—in the virtuous—that I fancied the better class of passengers seemed to turn round and regard us with reproving looks. In Buckram Terrace, this was

even more the case than elsewhere, and when the butler opened the door to us, I distinctly heard him murmur : 'Gracious Evans !'

As I rose to leave the hated vehicle, these circumstances were fully explained. Clementina had quietly dropped her orange-peel over the little door, and upon the gangway of the hansom there lay what looked like the *débris* of sixty oranges instead of six.

Words are wanting to describe the nature of my reflections—and of those of other people's—upon the events of that day with our widow ; but I may observe that next morning there was a visible increase in the number of gray hairs in my whiskers : another such experience would make me an old man.

Since the above catastrophe, I have been placed in several false positions with respect to Mrs. Mulligar Tawney, nor do I know how to estimate the loss that my character, through her exceeding naturalness, has sustained. Dearest Julia protests that her simplicity is charming, but for my part I should prefer her artificial. Compelled to take her out in the inevitable hansom, to see the illuminations upon the night of the Queen's birthday, we got 'blocked' in Saville Row opposite Poole's crystal pillars. 'Separated from their party again, by Jove, Tattel,' observed a voice I knew.

'And fortunately with the same fair companion,' returned the military cynic.

'Well, it's a comfort to think it's *the same*,' rejoined the first voice. And then there was a malicious titter.

'Drive on,' cried I, in terrible tones, through the trap-door ; 'I will pay for all you may run over.'

I had somehow not thought it worth while to go down to the club since that day at Richmond ; and I have now sent in my resignation as a member of the *Mcgatherium*. To get rid of our widow, thus encouraged by dearest Julia, is out of the question. I have therefore made up my mind to enter parliament, for the purpose of introducing into this country the system of Suttee (opposed by Clementina for such obvious reasons), with a particular proviso that the act shall be retrospective.



MR. BULLION'S REVENGE.

F*didicisse fideliter artes really emollit mores*, it would appear that the bank-clerks of the metropolis, as a class, though certainly not without many exceptions, have had that part of their education strangely neglected. Perhaps, as the possession of much money rather puffeth up than conduceth to humility, it may be from some effect of the mere handling of gold and silver that courteous manners are so often wanting in this body of public servants. However it be everyone must have remarked how difficult it is to get a civil answer to a question, or an answer at all, across a banker's counter; how even the unprotected female is so rarely able to win from them a smile or a bow. Let it not be urged that the gentlemen whose mission it is to count bank-notes with a wet finger, or shovel out sovereigns by the half-hundred, cannot behave better if they would, since, if any customer enters who is known to have a heavy balance in his favour, and who desires to see the manager in his private room, their civility becomes as remarkable as was their previous indifference.

Of course, there are some circumstances to be adduced in mitigation: a mistake in their accounts is of more importance than it would be in those of other trades, and their attention is therefore more closely demanded; they have always, too, to be on their guard against deception. Still, a respectable majority of those who enter the swing-

doors of such establishments are neither thieves nor forgers ; they have the right accorded by the law itself, to be considered innocent unless proved otherwise ; and the air of mingled suspicion and insolence with which they are too often regarded by the money-changers, is therefore quite indefensible. I dare say these spruce and dapper officials have not seldom very stupid people to deal with ; but even with these they should have patience ; while it should be remembered, that a knowledge of the latest rate of discount does not exhaust the fountains of human intelligence, and that they may perhaps be treating as an ignoramus one who, upon all other subjects, is infinitely better informed than themselves. Indeed, it is rather the trustful habit of persons of learning and genius to put themselves in the hands of their lawyers, doctors, and men of business, imagining, with touching simplicity, that those who have wholly applied themselves to a single branch of study are likely to have mastered it ; and these, therefore, are often the least informed about such matters as bankers have to do with, and therein especially subject themselves to the slights of the gentry whom I have in my mind. It is a very flimsy defence to urge in favour of any class of people, that they have no time for civility, since railway guards are well known to be the politest of men ; and, moreover, the rudeness of bank-clerks is often a *loss* of time, since they have to explain to ladies the meaning of their barbarous slang of *Long or short ?* or *How'll you have it ?* after all.

It is at the Bank of England, I think, that these uncivilised habits culminate ; so that upon dividend-day you might almost imagine, if ignorant of the meaning of City terms, that all the bears of the Stock Exchange had been sworn in for the purpose of transacting the business of the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street upon that particular occasion. I don't know how the appointment of a bank-clerk is obtained, but I strongly recommend if there be any intellectual ordeal in the shape of examination, that it should for the future comprehend the primary elements of good-manners, including, at least, the respect due to age and sex. These opinions I was stating at some

length to my friend, Mr. Bullion, late of Lombard Street, while staying at his pleasant country-house in Somersetshire, and, very much to my surprise, he endorsed them with great readiness. I thought that, having been a banker himself, and from what I knew of him besides, he would defend his cloth *à l'outrance*; but far from doing so, he favoured me with a personal experience of his own in confirmation of what I had been saying.

'It is very true,' said he, 'that a stranger often meets with great rudeness in City banks. The clerks are too apt to imagine that everybody is by profession a man of business who happens to have any dealings with them; they will let him stand for half an hour without telling him which desk to apply to; and, even when addressed, they will scarcely vouchsafe him an answer. But the clerks in other banking establishments are quite polished gentlemen compared with some with whom I have myself had dealings in the Bank of England. No worrying by stupid people can excuse such contemptuous indifference for the difficulties of others, or snappish replies to genuine enquiries as I have witnessed there. But worst of all is conduct of this kind when the bank-clerk does not even possess the trumpery knowledge which begets his impertinence. The other day, I went up to town to get my dividends. The clerk at whose desk I made my application tendered me the proper document as usual, but added, as he did so: "Well, is this all you want?"

"Yes; thank you," said I; for I have been always a civil-spoken person, I hope, whether as clerk or partner.

"Much *you* know about your own affairs," rejoined the official gruffly. "You've got last year's dividends to draw."

"No," said I, "you are mistaken there."

"*Am* I?" returned he, contemptuously. "And there's the year before that too, you wiseacre. What is the good of a fellow like you pretending to do business!"

'He tossed me over the other papers, and I filled them up as usual. I was perfectly well aware that the man was wrong; but the combination of insolence and ignorance in him tickled my fancy.

"Well," said I humbly, "I suppose these are all that I am to have, at all events?"

"Well, then, you suppose wrong," sneered the dividend-clerk. "Go over to that gentleman at yonder desk, and tell him what has happened here, and ask him whether he has got anything for you. Why, you're a mere baby."

'I thought to myself: "If you were in the house of Bullion & Co., my young friend, I'd read you a lesson about politeness to your master's customers, that you wouldn't forget in a hurry;" but I did as I was told without reply.

'The dividend-clerk to whom I was referred regarded me as though I had been a black beetle. "What's the use of people of your sort coming to a place like this?" asked he. "You're from the country, I suppose?—Ah, I thought so. Why don't you get a lawyer to do your business for you, and not take up our time in this ridiculous manner? Why, you've got five years' dividends to receive; you know no more about your own property than an Ojibbeway."

"I don't think I have any back-dividends to receive at all," said I; "but when I get home, I'll look at my banker's book."

"Banker's book!" repeated the official sardonically; "you should buy a horn-book first, and study your A B C."

'To make a long story short, I went back to my hotel with a great deal of money thrust upon me by these good gentlemen of the Bank of England, to which I had no more right than you have; and having referred to my banker's book, just for form's sake, although I was quite sure of the fact, I wrote to one of the principal officials in Threadneedle Street to let him know what had happened.

'Conceive my indignation, Sir, at receiving a reply couched in the most insolent terms, and directing me to repair to the Bank at a certain hour the next day to refund those moneys "of which I had improperly possessed myself."

'I don't think that I was ever made so angry before in

all my life. I wrote back a reply which I flatter myself the principal official was not in the habit of receiving. I let him know who I was, and I also favoured him with my opinion of the manner in which business matters were conducted at his little establishment. I concluded by stating that, so far from repairing to the Bank myself, I should require any person concerned in rectifying the stupid mistake of his subordinates to be at my hotel the succeeding day between the hours of one and two, when I should be at lunch : but at no other time would I receive them.

‘Accordingly, the two bank-clerks, with a cab full of dividend-books, came to see me lunch, and hear my lecture upon politeness and accuracy ; and I hope it did them good.’

These remarks of Mr. Bullion were made some years ago ; but partly from the fact that his observations are always delivered with great *aplomb*, as though he were dropping gold, and partly from the unusual circumstance that we happened to agree with one another upon the matter in question, I had not forgotten the particulars of the adventure above described, when I met my friend the other day in the Poultry.

‘Well, my dear Sir,’ said I, ‘I trust that the Bank of England has been putting no slight upon you lately.’

‘I have not given them the opportunity, Sir, since that dividend-day,’ returned Mr. Bullion, purpling with indignation at the mere reminiscence ; ‘but I dare say they are as ignorant of their business as ever. Well ; we’re close by the place ; let us try.’

‘Try what?’ asked I aghast. ‘You have got no dividends to draw.’

‘No, but I’ve got a five-pound note to get changed.’ Mr. Bullion pulled out a roll of them that made my mouth water as a hungry man’s might at another sort of roll. ‘I dare say they’ll make some stupid objection. Come along.’ I could not surmise what was about to happen ; but I confess I was greatly gratified at being associated with the great Bullion upon such an enterprise ; just as one might feel honoured in being appointed second (or

still more, to hold the stakes) in an encounter between my Lord Overstone and Baron Rothschild.

We entered the great temple of mammon, and Mr. Bullion tendered his five-pound note at the mahogany altar.

The officiating flamen gave it one searching scrutiny, and shovelled out the five sovereigns upon the counter.

'I suppose that note is a good one,' observed Mr. Bullion quietly.

With a swift sweep of his practised fingers, the clerk regained possession of the gold, and regarded us with mingled aversion and dismay.

'What do you mean?' said he, re-examining the note, and this time with elaborate care.

'I suppose it *is* a good one,' repeated Mr. Bullion.

'Well, I don't see anything the matter with it; but you must put your name on the back.'

'O no dear,' returned my friend decisively; 'I should not think of doing that. Why, how do you know I can write?'

'Ah, you can write well enough,' said the clerk impatiently. 'Come, none of your tricks. If you don't put your name upon it, you shall not have your change.'

'My name *is* upon it,' returned Mr. Bullion gravely.

'I don't see it,' replied the clerk, holding the note up to the light. 'I can see nothing on the back at all.'

'It's on the front, my good friend: *Or Bearer*. My name's Bearer, so far as you are concerned. I shall write nothing else upon that note.'

'Then you won't get your change,' rejoined the official.

'Very good, my friend,' returned Mr. Bullion, taking out his huge gold watch, and placing it upon the counter. 'I give you ten minutes to make up your mind upon that point. If I do not receive my money by sixteen minutes after two precisely, I bring my action against your employers the Governor and Company of the Bank of England. They will have to show cause why they shall not be declared bankrupts. I again tender you this note, issued by them. Do you intend to refuse payment?'

The spectacle of determination and impassivity afforded

by Mr. Bullion might have moved firmer minds than that of the unfortunate bank-clerk. He murmured something about consulting the head of his department, and disappeared within the interior of the building. We remained the centre of an admiring commercial crowd, the majority of whom, I believe, imagined us to be a couple of audacious swindlers. At eleven minutes after two, Mr. Bullion addressed a neighbouring clerk in a sonorous voice :

‘You had better inform your fellow-clerk, young man, that half the time of grace allowed by me to his employers, the Governor and Company of the Bank of England, has now elapsed. In five minutes it will be too late for them to meet this their just engagement.’

At these awful words, the second clerk dived into the same back premises to which the first had already betaken himself. At 2.15, to a second, the latter returned, with the note in his hand, and very red in the face. He shovelled out the five sovereigns with rather unnecessary vehemence, but without one word of comment.

‘Thank you,’ said Mr. Bullion courteously. ‘I thought you would not require my signature. If ever I publish a book about the duties and behaviour of bank-clerks, dedicated to the proprietors of this respectable establishment, I’ll send you a presentation copy.’





DOWN-STREAM.

IT is late autumn, and all London is out of town save myself. I am detained in that hateful brick-kiln, while my friends and acquaintances are upon the breezy moors, or climbing snowy mountain-tops, or lying listless by the calm cool seas. I shall have no autumn holiday this year; nothing remains for me but iced beverages, and the memory of vanished pleasure-trips. Let me recall one of these latter, and set it down; for while I do so, a panorama of exquisite landscape pictures passes through my brain, and, for the time, obscures the desolate dusty road, the white and blinding street. My mind, thank Heaven, is stored with many such recollections. Which of them shall I summon up to comfort me? Already I feel myself a willing captive, taken in a net of sunny thoughts. I draw at random from the rainbow skein.

It is a record of last spring-time, a gossamer-memory, with the dew and sunray on it still.

In the early summer, not when 'the spring is setting in with its usual severity,' but a little later, when the streets are filled with light white-awned carts, full of blooming flowers, and when women bearing baskets of charming posies, make sweet the London air; then it is, even more than in the autumn (I say it even now), that

one longs to flee from bricks and mortar into the country. Moreover (which is surely a charm), one should not do it. Business demands one's presence in the metropolis; there is no legitimate vacation at that period for people of our quality. Hence it is the very time for a holiday. Nor can we properly enjoy it alone. I don't say that one should take one's wife and family; far from it; they will go to the sea-side, doubtless, in due time; but the epoch of which we speak is essentially masculine and (if I may say so) bachelory. It is necessary to take three friends (all of whom are also doing wrong in leaving their business at such a season), for, notwithstanding the lavish promises of the barometer, it may be wet; and the country under rain, and without the raw material of a rubber at whist, is well known to be unbearable. Also these friends must be judiciously chosen: a morose man, a stingy man, a fool, or one incapable of laughter, would shipwreck the whole clandestine scheme. Many a man who is a very decent companion at the club in Pall Mall, would be hateful in a village inn. Finally, let everybody have to be back in town again by a certain day and hour, upon business of the most serious importance, and let nobody get back when he intended, and let that business be postponed. A certain recklessness of consequences is indispensable.

Upon the occasion I have in my mind, we were four chosen souls. Each, if not at the very summit of his profession, deserved to be there, and may be designated as if he was. There was the Merchant Prince, a man truly gorgeous in his ideas, and magnificent in the execution of them; there was the Lord Chief Baron of the Exchequer, who audited our accounts, and exhorted us to stand upon our rights whenever men oppressed us; there was Professor Beeswing (of the Entomological Society), with the most varied information, perhaps, that ever existed in a single human storehouse; and there was the Deathless Author, a gentleman whose powers of fiction are by no means confined to the construction of books. It was this last individual who had organised

the expedition, and settled its destination — Willow Bridge, beautifully situate upon the river Thames, and not a thousand miles from Marlow. ‘We will fish for gudgeon—creatures that you catch in myraids as you sit in an arm-chair in your punt. Then we will drop down to Cliefden Spring, and stroll in those glorious woods. I know every inch of the river. It will be divine.’

Something like this he said to all, but exhibiting some especial bait to each. To the M. P. he spoke of the cookery of river-fish, which he portrayed as unique and perfect; to the L. C. B. he held out a solemn promise that we should be warned off a certain island, which the public had nevertheless an indefeasible right to land upon and occupy; while to the Professor he painted a particular species of butterfly to be found in the vicinity of Marlow only, in the lively colours of his own imagination. Thus it was that he seduced the party to Willow Bridge, where they put up at the *Swan-on-horseback*, ‘famous inn.’ In an hour or so, we had left London behind us at an infinite distance, with all its wicked works. It was a holiday in itself to mark the landlord ‘seeing what he could do’ in the way of sleeping-apartments and a private sitting-room; to hear the landlady express her opinion that ‘it might be done;’ to behold the waiter unconcerned in these arrangements, taking the air at the front-door, and shading his eyes from the fiery sun with a napkin; to watch the people leaning over the bridge, with their heads close together, and chewing straws or pieces of stick, which presently they dropped into the fleeting stream, and set to work anew. Nobody was in a Cheapside hurry; nobody was possessed by the devil of Competition to tout for custom. When the Deathless Author led us down to the river-side, and bid us choose our fishing-punt, we were not torn to pieces by the skinny fingers of opposition Ancient Mariners.

‘Did you want to go on the water, gentlemen?’ enquired a comfortable boatman, lazily removing his pipe from his mouth with one hand, and scratching his head with the other.

‘Certainly, my good man,’ replied the D A cheer-

fully: 'we are come to fish for gudgeon. Big punt—arm-chairs—lots of luncheon—worms and ground-bait—floats and rods. Come, look alive!'

But the mariner only shook his head.

'There aint no ground-fishing yet awhile, bless ye. You may get a trout, mayhap; but it's like to be a long business. How many days are you going to stay?'

'Oh, this is so like the Deathless Author,' cried the Merchant Prince with a scornful smile. 'I wonder there's a river here, for my part.'

'My dear Sir—my very dear Sir,' cried the D. A., 'there must be some frightful mistake. Now, leave this man to me.—Do you really mean to say that we can't go gudgeon-fishing?'

'Why, in course you can't. It's a fenced month.'

'A what? a what?' exclaimed the L. C. B., speaking very fast. 'That's a very nice question; I should be inclined to dispute that fact. Now, here is my name and address, my worthy man. O yes, we'll try this question. What do *you* say, Beeswing?'

'Hush! be quiet; don't move—don't stir,' returned the Professor earnestly. 'You've got the most splendid specimen of the stinging dragon-fly on the nape of your neck. Only wait till I get my net.'

'The river is charming,' remarked the Deathless Author, with galvanic enthusiasm—'perfectly charming. It would have been almost too hot for fishing; let us row to Cliefden Spring. It is the most beautiful stream-scenery in the world, and the duchess permits everybody to enjoy it. I am quite sure that will please you. Yes, let us row up there. "You call it 'up' to Cliefden, don't you, my man?"'

'Well, Sir, it's *down-stream*, any way,' replied the mariner, regarding the D. A. as if he were little better than a born idiot.

'And this is the man who has brought us to Willow Bridge, under pretence of knowing the country!' ejaculated the M. P. 'He pretends to have been born in the district. He assured me only last night that the *Swan-o-n-horsback* made up a hundred beds.'

‘Never mind,’ said the Professor good-naturedly ; ‘let us forgive him. There are beds enough, and the genus *Cimicidæ* is doubtless unknown to them.’

‘I am appeased,’ quoth the Merchant Prince sententiously. ‘Let us take boat, and be off.’ And there being no gilded barge in waiting manned with slaves in crimson, pulling silver oars, or other vessel suitable to his quality, we stepped into a painted pleasure-boat and set off for Cliefden Spring.

I do not describe that voyage, since the same water was afterwards rowed over by the same goodly company ; enough to say that it was charming as a siren’s song ; the Lord Chief Baron’s brow grew smoother with every dip of oar ; Professor Beeswing sat with half-closed eyes watching the insect creatures skimming the stream, like a happy cat dreaming of *entrées* of fish and mice. The Merchant Prince was pleased to acknowledge the attention that was shown him by the setting sun, and to express his satisfaction with the general arrangements of nature for his reception on the river. The Deathless Author kept a divine silence, partly because he wished the scene to sink into the soul of his companions, whose indignation still might smoulder, and partly because speech was frozen within him, with the apprehension of that very misfortune which subsequently occurred.

When they came in sight of Cliefden’s hanging woods, a murmur of admiration broke from two of those who had not seen that leafy paradise before. ‘We forgive you—we thank you—we applaud you,’ exclaimed they with a single voice, and grateful looks towards him who had organised the expedition. ‘How charming it will be to plunge into the green coolness of those woods.’

The Merchant Prince, without letting himself down to vulgar jubilation, regarded the white palace glinting from the full-foliaged hill above us, as though he would like to buy it.

‘Can one go up to the house, and see the place?’ enquired he of one of the boatmen.

‘No, Sir ; nor *land at all*, if the duchess is at Cliefden.’

‘What!’ cried the three strangers, turning like one

man—and not a good-tempered one either—upon the Deathless Author. ‘Can this be true?’

The unhappy fictionist smiled in a ghastly manner, and gave them to understand that the boatman was a well-meaning dullard, whom it would be idle to cross-examine. ‘*And besides,*’ added he, ‘the duchess is sure not to be there.’

‘I don’t like that,’ observed the M. P. sharply, who though so wealthy, was not deficient in intelligence.

The Lord Chief Baron cast a withering glance upon the deceiver, as upon some prevaricating witness, whom he should like to turn inside out by cunning questions.

The Professor regarded him with that calm contempt which he bestows upon mayflies, and the less common *Neuroptera*, of which he has already specimens in his collection.

The Deathless Author offered not a syllable in defence. He already perceived an official person of forbidding exterior standing at the head of the landing-stairs. He knew what he was put there to say.

‘Nobody can come ashore to-day, gentlemen; the duchess is at Cliefden.’

‘I suppose it *is* her private property,’ observed the L. C. B. reflectively; ‘one couldn’t prove right of way.’

At this audacious observation the ancestral retainer glared at us as at a ship-load of blasphemers and river-pirates, and waved us off with a majestic motion of his hand.

The boatmen grinned in their sleeves, or would have done so if they had not been bare-armed, and turned the head of our little craft towards Willow Bridge.

In half an hour or so—such is the blessed influence of stream-scenery—all disappointment had faded from the memory, and even confidence in the Deathless Author was almost restored.

Of our stay at that admirable river-inn I shall say nothing. The chief charm of life in such a place is that nothing happens worthy of being recorded. To eat, to drink, to sleep, to saunter on the sloping lawn, and smoke the dream-compelling weed; to lie at length with-

in the rocking skiff, and hear the whisper of the river-nymphs, and feel their cool breath through the tender plank ; to bask beneath the willow, lulled to sleep by the thunder of the roaring weir — these things, distinct enough in the clear depths of memory, have not a substance that the pen can picture. Man, being made for action and material matters, tires in time of all such pleasant shadows. There was a bridegroom staying at Willow Bridge, who, it was plain, for his part, had had more than enough of them. How he did gape, and yawn, and sigh for very weariness ! The obsequious manner in which he strove to make himself agreeable to us, and thereby win conversation and relief from inexpressible *tedium vite*, was touching to behold. But four is company and five is none, so we cast the poor wretch from us. We froze him with our icy speech as he strove to climb into our pleasure-galley out of the ocean of *cnnui* ; we jested among each other at his drowning agonies, and threw champagne bottles, as it were, at his head as he went down. We chopped his fingers, figuratively speaking, with sharp epigrams, and so made him loose his hold. He must have looked upon us like a second crew of the *Flowery Land*.

The L. C. B., who is a determined bachelor, remorselessly bade him cleave to his lawful wife. Indeed, we had no sort of pity for him. *We* had not been shut up for three weeks at Willow Bridge with a feeble young female, who objected to smoking. *We* did not hear a still small voice—but getting perceptibly louder—crying : ‘ *Charles, love, the tea has been brought up !* THE TEA IS READY, CHARLES, DEAREST ! THE TEA IS GETTING COLD, CHARLES !’

At which last sentence, or *ultimatum*, Charles surrendered at discretion, and went in wearily through the French window. No, for our part, we welcomed such lotus-eating (which included two courses of excellent fresh-water fish) very gladly, and were truly grieved when the time came for us to part. When it became absolutely essential that the M. P. should preside at the meeting of the Golconda Mine Company ; when it was a *sine quâ*

non that the L. C. B. should state his views upon a matter of trespass before a high legal tribunal ; when the Professor must needs read his exhaustive paper upon the emanations of the *Silphidæ* before the Society for the Encouragement of Insect Knowledge ; when the Deathless Author, whose word was his bond—and quite equal in pecuniary value—had solemnly promised to personally superintend the production of one of his own volumes in Paternoster Row ; it was on that very morning, I say, when Duty, with her customary scowl, was bidding us resume hateful toil within city walls, and leave the rare spring sunshine, and the gleaming river, and the emerald fields, that the Merchant Prince astonished the company, as the fatal railway omnibus drove to the door, by observing with audacious calmness : ‘I have a great idea, my friends ; we won’t go by the train at all.’

‘Our luggage is packed,’ sighed the Professor, pointing mournfully to his large tin butterfly case and little carpet-bag awaiting removal in the passage.

‘Let the luggage go, then,’ returned the M. P. authoritatively. ‘But as for us, let us drop down the river to London.’

So immeasurably distant did Willow Bridge, and especially its winding river, appear to us to be from the great Babylon, that this suggestion struck us all aghast.

‘Drop down the river !’ repeated the L. C. B. doubtfully, and as though he saw several flaws in the proposition already. ‘Down to Windsor, you mean.’

‘Down to London Bridge !’ quoth the M. P. resolutely. ‘Land short of that—say at Blackfriars—and the whole scheme would be a failure.’

The Deathless Author already perceived himself in a frail skiff, amid the whirling eddies of Westminster, rocked by express steamers, and coming to grief against the piers of bridges. His countenance was unmistakably negative.

The Professor murmured that it was impossible to observe the *Phryganeæ* beyond Hammersmith.

‘Very good,’ observed the Merchant Prince, with the

air of a man who has given up a point to oblige his fellow-creatures. 'Let us say Hampton Court. We shall then have only fifty miles or so to row.'

'Row!' exclaimed the L. C. B. 'I would not row ten miles for ——'

'My friends,' interrupted the Merchant Prince majestically, 'the matter is in my hands. When I say "we shall row," I mean it in the same sense as "we shall sail." No physical exertion will be necessary. I engage a crew of two. We take turns in the arduous duties of steering. I invite you to dine with me at Hampton Court.'

In half an hour, we were dropping down the river, in the good skiff *Cygnets*, between the level meadows down to Camelot—no, to Cookham. The boat was green and gold, the cushions scarlet, and the even dip of the four oars had a silver sound. All else was silent, save for the hiss of the angry swan, as we came too near her throne among the osiers, or infringed upon her royal progress through the river; and save for the monotone of the cuckoo in the far-distant woods. Only, ever and anon, our stroke would rest upon his oars, and raise his voice in a wild melody of 'Lok, Lok, Lok,' and the locksmith would come forth from his cottage, and open wide the barriers of the flood, and shut us in. Then slowly sank the boat, and the water with it, till the trim bright garden sloping to the brink could be seen no more, and the black gates loomed larger and larger momentarily, and the dark sides of our water-prison deepened. Then, upon ransom being counted out, sometimes into a little cup at the end of a pole, with which, for convenience of payment, our warder favoured us—as a child feeds Bruins in a bear-pit—he let the sunlight once more in upon us, and set us on the broad and shining river-road. I am afraid to say how many of these aquatic turnpikes we passed through, but we never tired of them, though each was as like to each as are sweet-pease. We concocted out of them a sensation novel for the Deathless Author, entitled the *Lock-keeper's Daughter*, of which, since he was not grateful for it, I am almost induced to publish the plot.

Suffice it to say, however, that our heroine fled from her amphibious home in evil hour, and returned only to perish there by her own act : when her father opened the gates to the first-comer in the summer morning, her golden hair was mingled with the weeds that clung to them ; and ever afterwards there was a ghastly cry of ' Lok, Lok, Lok ' oft heard at night. If the plot of this lock story should be too involved, suggested [the L. C. B. (whose nature is cynical), Chubb (of which there was plenty in the neighbourhood) would doubtless supply it with a key.

We composed the most thrilling parts of this original narrative in the various boat-houses into which we were driven by the passing spring showers ; and a general curdling of the blood, known to novel-readers as ' creepiness ' (a little assisted, perhaps, by the change of temperature), was inwardly experienced on such occasions. The steering into these havens of refuge was by no means an easy matter ; the entrances were always narrow, though they afforded a wide field for discussion as to how they should be approached ; and oftentimes the passengers of the *Cygnets* found themselves, along with their unskilful coxswain, exposed to the whole fury of the elements while the rowers, in the more favoured half of the boat, were under cover. Everybody thinks that he can poke a fire and steer a boat. I dare not record how many times we grounded on the golden shallows under the haughty guidance of the Merchant Prince ; how often we stuck upon sandbacks, over which the L. C. B. insisted upon trying his favourite question of right of way ; how oftended the spectacled Professor, bent on dragonflies, took us slap into the osiers. Once the Deathless Author (besides minor errors), seeking to win renown by taking the boat through a narrow arch without unshipping, came full butt against the buttress, and nearly brought both voyage and voyagers to their end. There were lively discussions upon our individual merits as navigators ; ingenious theories as to why swans tip themselves topsy-turvy, and remain with the other end of them (if I may say so) growing perpendicularly out of

the water like a white cabbage; and learned explanations from the Professor of the phenomenon of the legs of the cattle upon the bank being only reflected in the stream *half-way*, and of what became of the other half.

The cattle, whether they so stood in the cool meadow-grass or descended to the cooler wave, were always a charming sight, as likewise were the swans, whichever end was uppermost. From stately Windsor, crowned with its royal abode, down to the smallest hamlet, every dwelling-place of man looked bright and beauteous. A hundred gray church towers greeted us through stately trees; a thousand villas smiled upon us from their flowery gardens.

‘Nice,’ said the Merchant Prince, with semi-approval, ‘from June to August; from August to June, nice also, doubtless, for frogs, toads, newts, and water-rats.’

But the M. P. had been put out of bliss by some cow-beef, of which we had imprudently partaken at a river-inn, and also made a little despondent by certain memoranda in a literary work—*The Oarsman’s Companion*, I think it was called—found in the pocket of our stroke. Nobody, it said, should ever step into a pleasure-boat without knowing how to behave towards the apparently drowned.

Avoid all rough usage, was the first canon.

‘Why, what a set of ruffians aquatic folks must be,’ exclaimed the M. P., ‘to need such an admonition! Would these boatmen proceed to kick us, if we fell over-board?’

Never hold the body up by the feet!

‘Did you ever hear of anything so barbarous?’

Nor roll the body on casks!

‘Really, this is too horrible! Casks!’

Nor rub the body with salt or spirits!

‘These men must be cannibals, my friends.’

Nor inject tobacco-smoke or its infusion into the nostrils.

‘I don’t like this,’ quoth the Merchant Prince, closing the horrid little volume, and wiping his brow with his pocket-handkerchief; ‘let us get out and walk.’

‘Ay, let us walk,’ cried the L. C. B., who is a member

of the Alpine Club ; “ we have had enough of sitting and of steering, we.”

‘ We have had more than enough of *your* steering,’ replied the Deathless Author viciously ; ‘ but let me beg that there may be no pedestrianism. Walking means no pleasant talking, no leisure, no laughter ; it means perspiration, dust, and the malignant joy of seeing others more tired than ourselves.’

But the words of the wise were disregarded. It was arranged that the boat should go on to Hampton in advance of us, while we disembarked, and made our way thither by the dusty roads. Those whom the gods wish to ruin, they first cause to take to pedestrianism. Before he left the galley, however, the M. P. had a lucid interval. ‘ Let us write down,’ said he, ‘ our orders for dinner, so that our boatmen may leave them with the landlord, and we may find the banquet prepared on our arrival. Which is the best inn ? ’

‘ *The Toy, the Toy,*’ returned the Deathless Author gloomily, averse to leave the silvery stream, the frequent splash of happy bathers, the scarlet cushions, and the motion without toil.

‘ To the landlord of *the Toy*, then, greeting : *Whitebait indispensable,*’ quoth the Merchant Prince, holding a turquoise pencil in his jewelled fingers—‘ *asparagus unlimited ; Moselle-cup iced.* Let us leave the rest of the repast to his own genius ! ’

I forbear to speak of that walk to Hampton along the hot white roads ; after the first ten minutes, all sank into the usual sulky silence. The L. C. B. alone, knowing what his legs could do, smiled grimly. All of a sudden, as we drew near our bourne, after hours of painful exertion, we beheld vast crowds of people coming forth to meet us.

The Deathless Author, well convinced that all would be laid to him in the way of misadventure, hung back a little, and addressed his silent friends, all walking for their lives.

‘ Look here,’ said he ; ‘ you’ll say it’s me, of course ; but I never advised your coming to dine at Hampton Court on a *Whit-Monday.*’

At these hideous words, the three stopped suddenly, and gazed reproachfully at the speaker.

‘So like him,’ said the M. P., pointing with a scornful finger—‘so very, very like him!’

‘There will be nothing to eat at all,’ groaned the L. C. B.

‘Little or nothing,’ sighed the Professor, looking into his case of entomological specimens, as into a larder.

We trudged on in dust and gloom. There were forty thousand persons under the chestnuts in Bushy Park. There would be a good many more in the inns. Still, man is prone to hope. We enquired at the first house we came to, which was the way to *the Toy*.

‘*The Toy*,’ was the reply, ‘does not exist: it has been turned these three years into a row of private houses.’

All groaned.

‘So very, very like him,’ quoth the Merchant Prince, with majestic pity. ‘Here is a fly—jump in. To the *Star and Garter*, Richmond.’

‘But the boatmen!’ murmured the L. C. B.—‘we are clearly liable.’

‘They have my name and address,’ responded the M. P. loftily. ‘I am as fixed to go to Richmond as was ever General Grant.’

So, in the glorious eventide, it happened that, sitting after a royal banquet over goodly wine, we once more saw the winding river which had borne us so far and well upon its quiet bosom, smelt once more the cool, soft river-airs, made odorous on their way by lilac flower and chestnut bloom, and all the sweetness of the land in spring. Then, pledging each the other, did we vow we never should forget that glorious holiday, but, marked with white in our life’s kalends, would keep it sweet and fair within our memory for evermore.



THE PLANTAGENET AND THE TRAVELLERS' JOY.

THE *Plantagenet*, above referred to, is a hotel of some pretension on the eastern seaboard of this favoured land. The *Travellers' Joy* is not a flower (nor anything like it) but a village inn, in the same locality, only more inland. It is my settled purpose, for the benefit of such of my fellow-countrymen as may be foolishly thinking of going out of town this summer, for the sake of sea or country air, to describe both these places.

Spring had put in that first deceptive appearance of hers, which she so frequently uses at the close of the winter weather; just as some base undergraduate at a voluntary theological lecture will leave his card in the professor's hand, and then slink out behind his back, she had shown her face, and we fondly thought she was about to stay; we did not suspect that old scoundrel Winter to be still lingering in the lap of May; and finding London hot, five town-bred gentlemen, including the present writer, resolved to go away.

One of these, Faintheart, a foreigner, opined that we should go to Paris, for that no other place on the earth's surface was in reality worth visiting.

Another whom I will call Mæcenas, because (Heaven bless him!) he is a patron of literature, proposed that we should repair to Menue, a certain manufacturing town (we understood) in the south of France, where, exactly

eighteen years and two months ago, he had had the very best dinner he had ever eaten in his life.

Brighteyes, a barrister, protested with cheerful alacrity that he would come into any gentleman's plan which did not necessitate crossing the Channel; but that since the nature of his constitution demanded a fortnight's complete repose after a sea-passage, and our whole holiday was not to exceed that period, the court (if we would allow him to call us so) must perceive that a home-journey was indispensable.

As I don't think I can speak French (or at least have never attempted to do so), I was equally opposed (though I did not think it necessary to give the reason) to foreign travel.

Then Slyboots, the savant—whom nobody has ever yet fathomed, no not even so far as to know where he lives—came in, as usual, with his casting-vote, and settled everything in his own way.

'Let us go to Shinglebeach,' said he.

'I don't like the name,' said Faintheart suspiciously.

'I don't like the place,' thought I to myself, for I remembered to have heard of suicide at Shinglebeach being rather a popular amusement in the summer months; but I held my tongue.

'Why Shinglebeach?' enquired Brighteyes in his swift cross-examining manner.

'It is a most attractive spot,' answered Slyboots gravely. 'The marks of ancient sea-margins are to be clearly traced miles inland. The most interesting ruin in Great Britain, the one most associated (if I except the Tower) with the history of our native land, is within walking-distance. Upon the downs in the neighbourhood, beetles of the rarest kind——'

'But the hotel?' interposed Mecænas rudely. 'What food is to be got beside your beetles? That is the point; I may say the only point about which it is necessary to be certain. Now, at Menue——'

'Stop, stop!' interrupted Brighteyes hastily; 'don't let us embarrass ourselves with Menue. You shall go there, my dear Mecænas, by *yourself*, when this little

expedition is over.—But now Slyboots, upon your solemn oath' [the savant turned deadly pale], 'I mean upon your honour' [the savant's colour returned; deception was familiar to him, perjury was out of his line], 'can you honestly recommend the hotel at this place, for you know we like our little comforts?'

'My good friends,' cried Slyboots, with an engaging frankness that has concealed his ways throughout life far better than any vulgar evasion could possibly have done, 'am I the man to deceive you? I have, it is true, never myself been to Shinglebeach, but I have always heard it spoken of as one of the most interesting of localities; the *Plantagenet*—— But you must surely have heard of the *Plantagenet Hotel*!'

I nodded, not because I *had* ever heard of it, but because Slyboots looked at me in his pleasant and persuasive manner.

'*He* knows it,' observed the savant triumphantly. 'Everybody does know it who knows anything about cookery.' [Mecænas, who prides himself even more upon the accuracy of his palate than that of his literary taste, winced at this.] 'If you are fond of kickshaws, the *Plantagenet* is the very place for you. As for Faint-heart, he will imagine himself once again in his native land.'

Faintheart shuddered; the subject was painful to him; his beloved country had been recently absorbed by the Prussian Eagle.

'As for you, Brighteyes, who are fond of walking——'

'One can walk *everywhere*,' observed that gentleman incisively.

'And as for *you*, my dear fellow,' continued the savant, turning his attentions from the uncompromising Brighteyes to myself, 'why, you know the *Plantagenet* already, as you know everything else, and I need not tell you how excellent is the accommodation it affords.'

It was weak of me to be silent, I am aware: if I had guessed the seriousness of the charge that I was subsequently to incur, I should have spoken, of course. But Slyboots is really so pleasant—and a compliment from

one of his intelligence is so well worth having—in short, I am afraid I not only nodded, but nodded an affirmative.

Shinglebeach is a hideous clump of houses upon a shore of rubble-stones. A long terrace of forbidding mansions, called the Esplanade—the outsides of which seem to be undergoing an operation analogous to moulting in birds, or the mange in dogs—is considered to be its most desirable locality, and each house is said to let during the summer months at from twenty to twenty-five guineas a week. There is not a tree to be seen, even by the aid of a Dolland's telescope, in any direction whatever, and in August I should fancy it would be hot. George III. once honoured Shinglebeach with his presence (probably during an aggravated attack of lunacy,) and the site of the residence he occupied on that occasion is still called Royal Terrace, and is charged for to tenants accordingly. George IV. also visited the place, in search of what peculiar pleasure it is impossible to guess; I incline to the belief indeed that Beau Brummell brought him down there as a practical joke, for we read that the friendship of those two worthies was abruptly terminated about that identical time. He stopped at the *Plantagenet* throughout his sojourn, which extended to fourteen hours, but contrary to his custom, left no memento of his visit in the shape of a new dish—at least we found nothing there in the culinary way of so late an epoch. No one would have guessed that a king had ever crossed the threshold, except for the majestic coolness of the landlord—and his prices.

‘Never shall I forget our first dinner in that delusive establishment, which, at the request of the party, I had ordered to be served in the *Plantagenet's* best manner, and for which I was, most unjustly, held responsible. Still less shall I forget the wines.

‘Is this *soup*?’ asked Mecænas during the first course, and with the air of a man really asking for information. ‘Because, if so, soup is new to me: I have never tasted soup.’

‘Well, I confess,’ said Slyboots, looking at me good-

humouredly, 'your soup is not quite up to the mark; but I dare say you will redeem yourself in the fish.'

'My soup! and redeem myself in the fish!' cried I scornfully. 'Well, that's a good one.'

'Well, let us hope it will be a good one,' observed Brighteyes, with his habitual cheerfulness. 'Let us trust it will be red mullet.'

'No. I know what it will be,' said Faintheart gloomily. 'It will be soles. They will have come down with us in the train from London. I know these British inns so well. Afterwards will appear something squashed and half cold, which, because it is handed round, they will call an *entrée*. Then there will be a leg of mutton: tough, oh, so tough! Then rhubarb-tart—always rhubarb tart; and a cheese which I don't mean to touch. Now, if we had gone to Paris—'

'Or, still better, to Menue,' put in Mecænas.

'Some of us would have been green and white by this time, and could have eaten nothing,' added Brighteyes, hastily; 'as it is, I have a magnificent appetite. Why the deuce don't that waiter come?'

'It is impossible to say,' observed Slyboots. 'I don't think he is responsible for his actions. I have tried to catch his eye once or twice, and he evades me in a very peculiar manner. Have you remarked, too, that he never speaks?'

We all agreed that there was something far from right about that waiter.

'Goodness gracious!' ejaculated Mecænas, passing a costly pocket-handkerchief across his ample brow; 'I wish he wouldn't stand behind my chair.'

'There is nothing to fear,' returned the savant calmly. 'I have studied the subject of homicidal impulse. A nervous manner; a disinclination to catch the human eye; an aversion to speech; profuse perspiration when addressed: these are all signs of suicidal mania. He will probably pitch himself out of window, when we are least expecting it.'

'Exit with the *entrée*,' observed Brighteyes epigrammatically. 'Hush! he comes.'

There was really something very remarkable about that waiter. He had a good-looking, though feeble face, but with an air of mixed abstraction and embarrassment that was most extraordinary; and he had never spoken a single word.

'What fish is it?' enquired Mecænas peevishly (he is a little impatient with respect to his food), before the cover had been removed.

'Fish me no fishes,' was the astounding reply of the waiter.

'This is most curious, most interesting,' murmured Slyboots (who was on the further side of the table). 'If we can only draw him out.—Waiter, are there any pleasant drives in this neighbourhood?'

The waiter showed his teeth good-humouredly, but emphatically shook his head.

'No drives, eh? Well, I suppose there are some walks at all events?'

But again the waiter showed his teeth, and shook his head more emphatically even than before.

'No walks, eh?' continued the imperturbable Slyboots. 'And I dare say there are no pleasure-boats to be hired for sailing on the sea?'

'Certainly not,' answered our mysterious attendant, as plainly as head and teeth could speak.

'Then please to bring the fish-sauce,' said Slyboots. Whereupon, repeating what sounded like 'Fish-horse,' in a mechanical manner, the unfortunate creature left the room.

We were looking at one another in solemn silence, not unmixed with alarm, when Faintheart, with an effort, thus expressed himself: 'There's nothing the matter with the poor fellow at all; he's a stupid British waiter, just as they all are. He had absolutely forgotten what he calls the fish-horse.'

'Stop a bit,' cried Brighteyes; 'I am not so sure.—Lift up that cover, Mecænas. I believe there is no fish beneath it. There; it's mutton! The fact is we are being waited upon by a gentleman from the continent. All foreigners have not your intelligence, my dear Faintheart—that's all.'

Brighteyes was right. This unfortunate waiter had been imported, like a coolie, to labour during the coming season at the *Plantagenet*. He had only arrived there the day before, and of course knew no more about Shinglebeach than we did. Being totally unacquainted with the British language, he naturally objected to be drawn into conversation, and shook his head with determination when addressed.

Faintheart, who is a polyglottist of the first-water, tried him with every modern tongue without effect: at last he gathered, from some chance expression, that this poor fellow's country had, like his own, been recently absorbed by the Prussian Eagle; and from that time they were allies. Faintheart thenceforward always spoke to him more in sorrow than in anger, whereas we used the contrary style. Since it comforted us and could not hurt his feelings, we applied to him every depreciatory epithet of which propriety admitted.

Next to that waiter at the *Plantagenet*, the most unsatisfactory things were what he brought. The courses were composed of precisely what Faintheart had predicted, except that we once had fish *à l'Indienne*—soles upon which the cook had emptied the remains of a pickle-jar.

It was a grand sight to behold Macænas enquiring with forced calmness for some (to him) necessity of the table.

‘Waiter, I do not see the asparagus!’

‘A-sparrow-gus,’ reiterated the unhappy alien, checking off the syllables upon his fingers (his proprietor absolved him, doubtless from respect to his outraged nationality, from wearing Berlin gloves,)—‘a-sparrow-gus;’ and down he fled to the kitchen with that cuckoo note.

The people below, ignorant that the vegetable is to be procured before May, imagined that we were making an April-fool of him.

But the wines! Good lack, the wines! If high prices could insure excellence in that way, the *Plantagenet carte* certainly promised the best vintages. The cheapest sherry was 6s. 6d. per bottle. That being absolutely

nauseous, we ordered the dearest (well was it called Golden!), at 8s. 6d.

'Now, *this*,' said Mecænas, smacking his fastidious lips, and addressing the unconscious waiter as though he were an immense congregation of attentive listeners—'this, although not good, is drinkable.'

My own firm and settled conviction is, that the one wine was identically the same as the other, except that, in the second case, they had added a little water: but even this scanty meed of praise I welcomed gladly. Little by little, Slyboots had shifted the whole responsibility of our coming to Shinglebeach upon my shoulders, and whatever went right, I was determined should go to my credit. The champagne was really not bad, and charged for at little more than double the price we should have paid for it in London.

The air was beautiful. Whenever we complained of anything amiss at Shinglebeach, the inhabitants were always prompt to reply: 'That may be; but then, what a beautiful air we have!'

This I do not deny; indeed, it ought to be good, for that air—taking the usual time allowed by the best medical authorities for expansion and contraction of the lungs—I calculated to cost us exactly fourpence-halfpenny a breath. No poet could treat himself to an inspiration down at Shinglebeach, and therefore the place will remain for ever unsung; otherwise, if a bard should ever make immortal that locality, and eulogise (by poetical license) the *Plantagenet*, he will scarcely fail to make mention of the reforms inaugurated in that establishment by five strangers—angels unawares—who once were lodged there. I say 'lodged' there advisedly, because, as will be seen, we were not altogether boarded. After that first dinner, we were of opinion that our breakfast could not be left to the discretion of the cook, so we summoned the landlord in person. It was no wonder that there was no flavour of George IV about him—no courtliness—no magnificent politeness. Nine landlords, since that Augustan epoch, had made their fortunes out of that inn. Of his wines, which were of the best brands,

he said [had he the faintest notion of what he was talking about?], no complaint had ever been made before. Asparagus was unattainable so early in the year. Gentlemen could scarcely expect fish for breakfast down at the sea.

'Well, let us have kidneys, and have done with it,' ejaculated Mecænas wearily.

'Kidneys, Sir,' returned the landlord in a deprecatory tone. 'Well, you see, Sir, with respect to kidneys, *Shinglebeach is such a little place.*'

We roared.

'Curiously ignorant of anatomy,' murmured Slyboots, to whom ignorance (manifested in others) is always bliss.

'Look here,' cried Brighteyes; 'may we order things in if we can find them in the town?'

'Most certainly,' replied the landlord, not one whit abashed.

And we did so. We bought kidneys (although it was such a little place), and asparagus and seakale, paying, however, a very considerable corkage on those delicacies. We introduced, too, apparently for the first time, into this establishment the condiment called salad, the materials for making which were obtained from the alien waiter by what is called 'the exhaustive process'—by rejecting a thousand things he brought, which were of no use, such as lemons, jam, a nutmeg-grater with nothing in it, and (especially) a local guide-book.

It was a perusal of this last which induced us to exchange our quarters for the *Travellers' Joy*, 'a small but comfortable country inn immediately opposite the most interesting ruin in all England.'

Slyboots had secured upon the downs a splendid specimen of that rare beetle, in search of which, and with no other object whatsoever, he had in reality brought us all to Shinglebeach, and was as anxious to depart as the rest of us. There was a stone gargoyle—the subject of much archæological controversy—somewhere about the historical ruin alluded to, which also attracted him in that direction.

'A country inn,' said he, in his mellifluous tones, 'is a

most charming affair : its snow-white coverlets, with a scent of lavender about them ; its fresh eggs and cream ; its excellent home-brewed ale. Then the house itself so picturesque and unpretending ; roses and honeysuckles contending for the mastery upon its cheerful face ; a hundred creepers——

‘Yes, beside those which are inside,’ quoth Faintheart. ‘I perceive it will be a failure already. We should certainly have gone to Paris.’

‘Or better still, to Menue,’ observed Mecænas.

‘Waited upon,’ continued Slyboots, without minding these interruptions in the least, ‘by a simple but beautiful country maiden, fresh as the morn.’

‘And who can speak English,’ added Brighteyes with vivacity ; ‘who labours under no depressing political circumstances. We will go to the *Travellers' Joy* to-morrow.’

On the morrow, therefore, after having despatched our luggage by train—for the village with the ruin was on a line of railway—we started on foot for our romantic country-quarters. Our bill at the *Plantagenet* was something enormous. We might have lived at the *Clarendon*, in town, for less money—and not been compelled to buy our own vegetables—so that, although we were glad enough to have got quit of the place, we felt like prisoners newly enfranchised indeed, but who had paid a most exorbitant sum for ransom. Only Brighteyes was merry. When asked the reason of his offensive cheerfulness, he only replied : ‘Ha ! ha !’ like a demon. We had left the inn, and climbed a little hill surmounting it, before he deigned to communicate the cause of his hilarity. ‘In the first place,’ said he, ‘there is this guide-book, which I have taken from the *Plantagenet* without paying for it : surely in itself some source of congratulation. And secondly, within the guide-book I have found these words of unspeakable comfort.

“It is a melancholy reflection,” quoted he, with gloating rapture, “that the devouring sea is slowly but surely making inroads upon Shinglebeach. In a decade of years” [that is guide-book for ten years, my Faintheart],

"it is doubtful whether the Esplanade itself, including that famous establishment, the *Plantagenet*, will not be encroached upon—nay, utterly overwhelmed!"

With a common impulse of fervent gratitude, such as is seldom seen except upon the stage, the whole party reverently raised their hats, and exclaimed: 'Thank goodness!'

'Fish-me-no-fishes will have fish enough then and to spare,' exclaimed Mecænas indignantly.

'Nay,' said Faintheart, 'the poor waiter, although he serves an extortionate master, is, as Mr. Gladstone has truly reminded us, our own flesh and blood.'

'Ah! he is not, however, *my* fellow-countryman,' observed Brighteyes drily.

'Hush, hush, my friends,' exclaimed Slyboots in his most impressive manner. 'Let us be charitable to all. The *Plantagenet* is doubtless exorbitant in its charges upon this very account. It knows that it has but a few years to live. We are now travelling inland, where no such excuse can be pleaded; where country pleasures, country produce, and objects of archæological interest

Here the savant found himself alone, the rest of the party having set off with some precipitancy when it was perceived that he was about to make a speech. Winking, therefore, at the surrounding objects, to express the mutual understanding known to exist between himself and all the works of nature, Slyboots trotted on after his friends.

It is the peculiarity of all country places that they are a good deal further off than common report asserts, or even than they appear to be in the landscape. The day was warm, the dust was thick, and we were thoroughly wayworn before the majestic ruin, opposite which we were to find the *Travellers' Joy*, began to appear. Mecænas (who is rather stout) felt perhaps most of all of us the effects of this protracted exertion, and a circumstance presently occurred which combined to prostrate his energies still further. Meeting an ancient rustic carrying a flail—quite a picturesque object, if one had

not been so tired—he must needs enquire of him, in his grand manner, as to whether the ruin before us was *the* ruin for which we were bound [as though there were likely to be two ruins, each about the size of Chester, within a stone's-throw of one another.]

‘My good man,’ exclaimed Mecænas, with the air of a lord of the soil remitting the punishment of death to his vassal, ‘is yonder ruin Fountains Abbey?’ [Let us call it so, though, of course, it was not *that*.]

It is impossible to describe in words the triumphant cunning which overspread that peasant's face as he replied: ‘Well, I dare say you knows just as well as I does;’ and with that he went chuckling down the road.

‘I really believe,’ quoth Mecænas loftily, ‘that that poor creature imagines that he has the advantage of me.’

‘Well, upon my life,’ said Brighteyes (and he expressed the feelings of us all), ‘I do think he has.’

What with this unfortunate rencontre and his fatigue, Mecænas could only be kept in motion by dilating upon the luncheon we would order upon our arrival, just as a bundle of hay dangled before a beast of burden is said to encourage it to renewed endeavours.

‘We will have a cold lunch,’ said Mecænas, ‘because it can be most promptly prepared.’

‘Cold lamb and mint-sauce,’ affirmed Brighteyes unctuously.

‘And Faintheart shall make the salad,’ added Slyboots, ‘in the approved manner used by his beloved country before it was absorbed by the Prussian Eagle; then afterwards, smoking the choice Havana, we will meditate in these noble ruins upon the glorious past——’

‘If you can only get there,’ observed Faintheart gloomily. ‘This high wall runs all round.’

‘That is merely to preserve them,’ explained the savant. ‘This historic pile is the heritage of every Briton—— What *is* the matter?’

Mecænas had dropped down upon a milestone as suddenly as if he had been shot, and was pointing feebly to an edifice that had just loomed in sight, if a one-storied house, presenting but four windows and a door, can be

said to loom. Upon its narrow forehead was painted the mocking words *The Travellers' Joy*.

'It may be very nice *inside*, though,' observed the savant, whose mind, intent on the stone gargoyle, was the first to recover from this moral shock.

Nobody answered him. Only a muffled cry of 'Lunch, lunch!' escaped from the lips of Mecænas.

We pressed on. The inn, so far from being the picturesque edifice the imagination of Slyboots had depicted, was like one of those fifth-rate places of entertainment in large towns which are called coffee-houses. The gates of the old ruin did indeed stand opposite, or we might have clung to the hope that there was still some shocking mistake. In that supreme moment I acknowledged to myself that there were worse places to lodge at than the *Plantagenet*. As for our sleeping in the house before us, the thing was impossible. *The Travellers' Joy* had barely accommodation for one traveller.

'What have you got in the house that is cold?' enquired Mecænas of the red-handed, black-faced female who answered the summons. He spoke with great elaboration and the quiet calmness of despair. 'Cold lamb—mint-sauce—salad. *Anything* cold; only be quick about it.'

'We have nothing *exactly* cold, Sir, in the house,' replied the damsel.

'What *can* she mean?' enquired Mecænas feebly. 'I am not equal to argue with this person. Nothing *exactly* cold!'

'It is my belief,' observed Faintheart gloomily, 'that she means there is a human body in the house—some person recently deceased.'

'Goodness gracious!' exclaimed Brighteyes, hastily recrossing the threshold; 'which is the way to the railway station?'

'My good girl,' resumed Mecænas meekly, 'we are very hungry, and shall be thankful for whatever you can give us. If you have nothing cold, have you anything hot?'

'No, Sir; we have nothing *exactly* hot.'

'Then what *have* you got?' enquired the judicious Slyboots.

'We have bread and cheese, Sir,' replied the maiden. 'Please step into the parlour.'

This was a cheerless apartment, which, by the smell of it, I should think had been hermetically sealed throughout the winter. It had five horsehair chairs in it, the contents of which had been much rifled—perhaps for *chignons*. A very extensive tea-tray upon the sideboard exhibited a picture of the local ruin executed in mother-of-pearl. Above the fireplace there was a portrait of a stout lady advanced in years. 'The recently deceased,' observed Faintheart in explanation.

'Where is the beer?' asked Brighteyes, when a loaf of stale bread, and a piece of cheese dreadfully like yellow soap, had been placed upon the table.

The maiden nodded, and presently appeared, like one in an allegory, bearing five stone bottles. 'The inn is a temperance house, and we have only *ginger-beer*,' explained she. 'Master begs you will be very careful with it.'

'Is it so strong, then?' enquired Faintheart cynically.

'Oh no, Sir; far from that; only he hopes you won't let it fly about, and spile the furniture.'

There was nothing for it but submission. A ghastly smile played upon our wayworn faces as we sat down to this repast. We had not the spirits to speak.

Slyboots only, still clinging to the gergoyle, requested the attendant to get the keys, in order that we might presently explore the historical ruins.

'O Sir,' said she, 'it's very unlucky, but the family don't allow the ruins to be shown at all this week, it being Easter-week. Now, any other time in the year that you should please to come down——'

Mecænas rose, and leaving the room without a word, moved slowly down the street towards the railway station; and one by one, each followed his example. We sat in the bare waiting-room of the little station for about four hours, until a train came—the only one in the day that stopped at that hateful place—and took us to London.

The catastrophe was too complete to admit of reproaches. Once only, on that prolonged journey (for it was a parliamentary train), there was a murmur from Faintheart.

‘If they had but taken my advice, and gone to Paris.’

‘Ay, or mine,’ echoed Mecænas feebly; ‘if we had but gone to Menue.’





THE ULTRA-MARINE.



KNOW something about hotels in England, both big and little. I have 'put up,' more than once—in the sense of 'to bear, to suffer'—with the accommodation at the *Universal Unlimited*, where you rise in a patent lift, through floor after floor, like a stage-ghost, until you arrive at the seventh—but if they call it a seventh heaven, that's a story. Who are the people that go about praising such caravansarais? Are they lunatics or paid agents? Or is it for the very love of lying that folks are to be found to echo that advertisement about 'the conveniences of a hotel combined with the comforts of a home?' Convenience! Comfort! It is said there are two hundred waiters, but 'what care I (as Sir John Suckling sings) how many there be, if there be not one for *me*?' I have rung and rung up in that attic with the latest improvements, until I have thought nobody could have heard anything *but* my bell, and yet not one of that 'efficient staff of servants, kept upon every floor,' has deigned to pay the least attention. It is a great satisfaction, doubtless, to some minds to know that there is a Great Chamberlain, with a private sitting-room of his own down stairs, to superintend such matters; but for my part, I would exchange him gladly for a page-boy out of livery, a maid-of-all-work, nay, a black, in my more immediate neighbourhood, who would procure me what I want at the first summons.

Similarly, to know that the cook is called a *chef*, and that he has five-and-twenty myrmidons in white caps and white aprons, is not only enough (as it ought to be), but as good as the feast itself which it is their duty to prepare. I, on the other hand, want my meals; and provided that they are good of their kind, and punctually served, I do not care three farthings for the machinery which has produced them. At the *Universal Unlimited*, it invariably happens that 'we are so exceedingly busy just now' that the dinner is considerably behind hand, and the intervals between the courses prodigious; the waiters run on with the dishes as in a pantomime, then hasten away to execute their daily feat of serving five hundred tables in an hour and a half. Like Falstaff (almost), they are not only waiters themselves, but the cause of waiting in other people. Moreover, if the hall-porter, instead of having a gold band round his cap, and a chair of state with a canopy whereon to sit, could manage to place my letters in my own sitting-room, instead of other people's, and *vice versâ*, I should prefer that alternative, even though he performed his duty in his shirt-sleeves. Also, when I want a piece of sealing-wax, or the loan of a pair of slippers, as the case may be, I don't wish to be referred to a department, as though I were the country at large, and the *U. U.* were the government, because, as we are all aware, that is only a synonym for infinite delay.

I am pretty well acquainted, too, with another sort of inn called the *Fine Old Crusted*, a *Family Hotel*, which lives upon its reputation; and I am happy to say has, in consequence, nearly got to the end of it. The principle feature of these establishments is dulness: the flavour that pervades them is dusty, rusty, musty, and fusty. They are almost admirably adapted for the convenience of persons belonging to 'much-respected' firms or banking-houses on the verge of insolvency, to end their days by violence. Not only is there nothing to seduce the mind that is bent on self-destruction to cheerfulness, but the furniture and fittings, the demeanour of the attendants, and the hush and gloom of the atmosphere, are most conducive to this fell purpose. Nay, if a person of a lively

fancy enter the portals of such an establishment, he very soon gets toned down to the appropriate pitch of genteel melancholy. If the landlady (a widow with a smile that reminds one of the silent tomb) doesn't do it, the head-waiter (formerly an undertaker's man) will do it; and if not they, the amount of the bill will most certainly do it; and you will leave that house a sadder and a poorer man. I was at such a family hotel lately, where they charged fourpence for an hour's loan of the *Times* newspaper. I ventured to suggest that the cost-price was but three-pence. The widow replied that, in her dear husband's lifetime, the parlours always paid their fourpence an hour; and, with Heaven's blessing, she would respect his memory, by keeping matters as they were. It was at this place, I think, that they charged the gentleman for the use of plate and glass, who had a tumbler of hot gin and water, and a spoon to stir it with, as he sat upon the coach-box outside the door.

I had had considerable experience of both these classes of hotels, as well as of others of a less ambitious sort; and not without reason, I flattered myself, like Mr. Dickens's Dollmaker, that I knew their tricks and their manners.

When, therefore, I was told that the *Ultra-marine* at Shingleton was an exception to all British caravansarais in the perfection of its arrangements and accommodation, I smiled good-naturedly upon my enthusiastic informant, and replied: 'Ah!' with significance. I concluded it would only turn out an exception in the sense of proving the rule. But as three of my friends and myself were about to leave London, as was our custom in the early summer, for a week's holiday, with all the world before us where to choose, it was determined, upon the great national principle of holding a man innocent until his guilt is proved, to give the *Ultra-marine* a fair trial: we had also about as much faith in its innocence as the public has in that of any criminal accused of a capital crime—and no more; for we four had tried so many inns in these periodical expeditions of ours—by the sea-side and on land, in town and country; and we had no

illusions to be disenchanted of with respect to such places.

And yet, so long as we could do as we liked—which proviso was indispensable—and were well housed and fed, we were not difficult to please. Of exalted social position at home, we sank our respective dignities when on these excursions of pleasure; and although the superscriptions upon the letters sent to us through the post remained as usual (and very useful they were in extorting respect, I do assure you), we ourselves were accustomed to address one another in a style somewhat more than familiar. It was our humour to counterfeit a small travelling menagerie, of which the Artemus Ward, or showman, was myself; the rare and valuable animals being, first, a distinguished member of the Alpine Club, playfully designated as the Rum-tum-foozle-um, or Climbing Ape—described (though falsely) by some natural historians as poising himself upon the tip of his tail while wondering at the works of nature; secondly, a prompt and wily individual, with a dangerous glitter in his eye at whist, which betrayed his possession of four by honours (he always held them), and who was termed the Serpent; thirdly, a gentleman of august proportions and constitutional opinions, known in political circles as the Great Conservative Body, but with us affectionately designated as the Performing Elephant, the best tempered and most sagacious creature that it is possible to imagine.

These names came to our lips, of course, as naturally as Jones and Brown to those of vulgar persons; but the listening to them was always a trial to the gravity of the waiters who attended upon us. We were sometimes left wholly without attendance, while they rushed out of the room, and exploded with laughter immediately on the other side of the door; nor could they be induced to return for several minutes, notwithstanding that the Rum-tum-foozle-um would fly to the bell with characteristic agility, the Serpent flicker (audibly) with his double tongue, and the Elephant trumpet so vigorously as to attract astonished crowds to our open window. These were the only occasions upon which I lost my control over this

otherwise truly 'happy family:' they would not listen to the voice of their Artemus while kept waiting for their food.

When we read in the train, on our way down to Shingleton, that there was an archbishop staying at the *Ultra-marine*, we looked at one another uneasily; not that we were not attached to the ecclesiastical establishment of our native land, or would not have died (so far, at least, as the Elephant was concerned) to have preserved its dignitaries; but should we be able to do as we liked in a house where there was an archbishop? I saw the Serpent wriggle, and the Rum-tum clutch at the carriage-cradle above his head, as though it would have relieved his mind to climb. But we had engaged our apartments, and it was too late. The *Ultra-marine* is a magnificent house, abutting, nay, overhanging (as its name implies) the deep blue sea. But for it, Shingleton would be nothing; while from its presence it derives fashion, fame, prosperity. Nobody knows how the colossal hotel arose; like most remarkable inventions, its originators are not to be discovered. It is darkly rumoured that they perished beneath the weight of their enterprise, and were mentioned (but not favourably) in the *Gazette*. Then another company took the matter up, and brought the building to completion: of course, they had no money left wherewith to furnish it, so a third set of speculators took their places at the pumps (for the difficulty in keeping such a monster afloat was prodigious), and stocked the *Ultra-marine* from garret to basement. But, instead of having done this in the ordinary hotel manner, there is not a single horsehair sofa, nor a convex mirror with an eagle on it, in any of the parlours, nor a wool-mattress on one of the beds. The living-apartments are not mere dining-rooms with a rickety chiffonier added, but are as home-like as it is possible for apartments to be which are not one's own; the sleeping-rooms are provided with all one (or two) can wish, with the exception of rough towels—an omission, doubtless, owing to extreme delicacy of feeling on the part of the management. The comforts of the body are of course provided for. There are cold-

baths, in whose marble depths you may procure the privacy which is denied you when using the machines upon the beach, and almost the coolness of the spectators; there are warm ones so seductive that they well-nigh persuade one to 'breathe a vein' in them (not, of course, in the marble, but in one's self), and leave the world like a philosopher. There are billiard-rooms, but cut off from the house by double-doors, so that the clergy staying in the hotel should not be scandalised. The best emotions of the human heart are fostered and encouraged. There is a ladies' coffee-room, into whose sacred portals it is quite a treat for a bachelor to peep, upon his way to or from his lonely chamber. Finally, the intellect is not neglected. There is a reading-room, open to every visitor at the *Ultra-marine*, amply supplied with copies of *Chambers's Journal*.

It will easily be imagined that I could not have introduced my menagerie into the coffee-room, even if they had been willing to enliven its spacious solemnity with their presence; but our private sitting-room was everything that could be desired.

'Ha, ha! a clock!' ejaculated the Elephant; 'there will, therefore, be no excuse for our meals being unpunctual.'

'A nice table for whist,' murmured the Serpent, 'supposing we were so unfortunate as to have bad weather.' [There was nothing this abominable reptile liked better than rain.]

But the Rum-tum-foozle-um uttered not a word. I attributed this to the flatness of the scenery through which we had lately travelled, for unless this animal perceives hills, he becomes dispirited.

'Come,' said I reassuringly, 'we passed a ruined castle, perched upon quite a precipice, a few miles from this: you shall climb up that to-morrow.'

But the Rum-tum-foozle-um shook his head. 'It is not *that*,' said he. 'But I don't like the gorgeous splendour of this apartment; those fine cut ornaments upon the mantelpiece, and that elaborate sofa: and I tell you what I don't like, my Artemus, I don't like those MAGNIFICENT

CURTAINS. Mark my words: *We shall not be allowed to smoke.*'

At this terrible prognostication, the other two members of the menagerie turned as pale as though they had just been sinoking for the first time, and the proprietor sank into a spring arm-chair, which, almost under any other circumstances than the present, would doubtless have afforded him comfort.

'Let us know the worst,' remarked I with calmness. Ring the bell.'

'I *can't*,' replied the Rum-tum-foozle-um with a mocking laugh. 'Oh, dear me, but this is a great deal too fine for *us*.'

He pointed to a placard above the bell-handle, upon which was printed: *This bell being constructed upon the atmospheric principle, visitors are requested to pull out the handle as far as it will come, and then press it back sharply.* The faces of the menagerie, including that of its proprietor, upon the receipt of this intelligence, afforded a study for any delineator of the sublimer emotions.

'Try it,' cried I, the first to recover myself from the natural stupor induced by scientific information.

'It may be dangerous: try it yourself,' murmured the Serpent doubtfully, and acceding to my request with the utmost caution. A dull thud, evidently confined to our own apartment, was all that came of it. Irritated by this failure, I seized the recalcitrant knob, pulled it out to its full limit, and let it go. The same dull thud was the reply. Except for the monotony of the sound produced, the whole scene reminded me of Collins's *Passions* in their attempt to play the guitar.

First Fear, his hand, its skill to try,
 Amid the chords bewildered laid,
 And back recoiled, he knew not why,
 Even at the sound himself had made.
 Next Anger rushed, his eyes on fire,
 In lightnings owned his secret stings,
 In one rude clash he struck the lyre,
 Which rings not, though it says it rings.

* * *

With eyes upraised, as one inspired,
 The Rum-tum-foozle-um sat retired,

like Melancholy herself, and could hardly be induced to try his hand at all at what his mind with reason misgave him would turn out to be a most miserable failure.

'Last came Joy's ecstatic trial,' and to the unlively pipe his trunk addressed. A clear and decisive 'ping' in some region without was the immediate result. Our Elephant had rung the bell! and from that moment (as in most other menageries) this sagacious animal was solely intrusted with that office.

When the waiter appeared, his reply to the great smoke question was, that there was a room of splendid proportions fitted up expressly *for* smoking.

'That means "No,"' murmured the Rum-tum dolefully, as the attendant withdrew. 'I knew how it would be. I must have my pipe in peace in my own arm-chair. I cannot ascend three stories after dinner.'

'Nor I,' said the Serpent viciously. 'I should like to see myself at it.'

'Nor I,' ejaculated the Elephant with a confident melancholy; 'it would be impossible, unless there is a lift.'

'My good creatures,' observed I, rising with the occasion, 'do not be despondent. After food, you will be brave and defiant. We will have our smoke to-night, even if we leave the *Ultra-marine* to-morrow.'

So, after a really excellent dinner, the *entrées* whereof had not previously (as is usual) been handed round at other tables, we ordered coffee; and when the waiter arrived with it, he found us each smoking a pipe, as Mother Hubbard found her dog Tray, and I think he was scarcely less astonished. Nevertheless, our silence and profound puffings, so like the Great War Council of the Ojibbeways, awed him to that degree that he made no verbal remonstrance. Thus our independence was proclaimed. Otherwise, had he 'gone to the manager'—a threat at the *Ultra-marine* for which there is no equivalent in the language of menace—there is no knowing what would have happened. That tremendous personage never presented himself to vision during our stay; but it was understood, that, in his private suite of apart-

ments upon the ground-floor, he maintained an almost regal state and splendour. His wife, who was visible in the *Ultra-marine* firmament at certain fixed epochs, was a magnificent person, of affable, though stately manners, from whom each visitor received a bow at his arrival, and another (if his conduct merited it) at his departure. And there were two charming young ladies in what the vulgar would call 'the bar'—a sort of Crystal Palace in miniature—who smiled and courtesied to each of us as we came down to breakfast every morning, and made me tremble for my too susceptible charges.

At 11 P.M., the waiter came to ask if we wanted anything more, as the establishment was about to close. The archbishop had already retired (archbishops' candlesticks, it was whispered, were supplied by the management with a small silver mitre, instead of the ordinary extinguisher); the nobility in the first floor had sought their coroneted couches (an ample supply of coronets being kept in stock); it was therefore fitting, he hinted, that the untitled gentry (for, no letters having yet arrived for us, our rank remained unknown) should retire likewise, and without making the least disturbance.

'I never go to bed till one,' observed the Rum-tum-foozle-um with decision; 'but as I always swarm up the banisters, nobody will hear a foot-fall.'

'As for me,' said the Serpent, 'I crawl upon my stomach, and make no noise.'

The waiter looked at the Elephant. That conscientious animal, well aware that the poet has truly described him as 'the huge earth-shaking beast,' took up his candle, and trotted off up stairs; while visitors paused at their toilets, and imagined that the night-express was panting in.

'As for me, I must sit up with my two animals,' said I, 'for they are not to be trusted; but I will retire to rest upon all-fours, and with my boots in my mouth.'

By 11 30, the whole establishment was bathed in slumber: the illimitable sea was imitating the *Ultra-marine*, all Shingleton was abed and asleep. In hushed voices, we whispered to one another of our experiences of other inns, and agreed we had never been in such a place

before—never. We listened, in the solemn silence of the night, and fancied we detected at intervals the archiepiscopal snore. The situation would have been sublime, but for the cachinnation of the Serpent, who always finds something ludicrous in the arrangements of good society. At one, we softly opened the door, and sought the candles that we had seen upon the table outside. There were now no candles. All was space and gloom. What were we to do? We could not carry away our chandelier with us. We could never find our way to our own apartments in the dark. What if we should wander into the archiepiscopal chamber, and be excommunicated before we could explain the circumstances! The ticking of the Louis Quatorze clock in the great hall was the only sound to be heard. I touched the Serpent, and felt him wriggle and shake with suppressed malice. ‘If you want to laugh, Sir,’ observed I severely, ‘go back to the sitting-room; the Rum-tum-foozle-um and myself will explore the establishment.’ We did so. A light glimmered down upon us from the topmost story, and we made for it with caution and without our shoes. I counted thirteen corridors and eleven flights of stairs. It was like Piranesi’s dream, as described by De Quincey. At last we perceived that what we sought was only a star shining through the skylight. By 2 A.M. we had got down again. There was a hissing noise in the hall, concerning the nature of which it was impossible I should be deceived. The Serpent was there, and in trouble. Contrary to my express commandment, he had gone gliding about the house in the grateful darkness, when a light was suddenly flashed upon him, and he found himself in the custody of the night chamberlain. Our travel-worn appearance, and the boots which we carried in our hands, corroborated our story, and we obtained his release and our bed-candles.

This was the sole misunderstanding that took place between any one of us and the authorities of *the Ultra-marine*: our relations with them grew friendlier and friendlier the longer we stayed. The cooks, both French and English, vied with one another to produce repasts

that should receive our approbation, and their efforts were most successful. When they sometimes outdid themselves by the production of some gorgeous sweetmeat that looked more like a Twelfth-cake ornament, or a firework, than something to eat, we never hurt their feelings by leaving it untouched. A large piece was always given to the Elephant, who, if he didn't like it, bolted it whole, and then trumpeted triumphantly. After the third exhibition of this performance, our waiter was able to remain in the room, pretending to busy himself at the sideboard, with his back towards us, and his shoulders shaking, while the majestic animal bid him inform the cook that the article in question was very good. I think I never laughed so much during the whole course of my life as I did during that week at Shingleton. The proceedings of my animals (which nevertheless, be it observed, are at all times polite and decorous) were so altogether different from those of the *habitués* of the *Ultra-marine*, that they often affected me to tears. When we tore ourselves away at the week's end, and the manageress gave me her plump white hand, like the Queen at a drawing-room, I thought I ought to apologise for their apparent eccentricities. 'The Elephant is young and frolicsome,' said I—'that's all. The Serpent is not quite so wicked as he looks. The Rum-tum-foozle-um is a good creature, although so restless.'

'My dear Sir,' returned she with a gracious smile, 'we are charmed with all of you. We are a little dull here at times. Your presence has been a great relief to the archiepiscopal element. We hope to see you again.'

'Madam,' said I, with profound respect, and raising a finger-tip to my lips, 'we shall never go anywhere else.'

And we never shall.



OUR LAST LODGINGS.

LET me make myself understood, reader, at the outset. The above title does not refer to that bourne from which no traveller ever returns, and which some have therefore identified with Kilburn. It means simply what it says. I propose to describe the last lodgings occupied by myself and my friend Grateman last Easter, the awful circumstances of which seem certainly worth telling, although they have given each of us a considerable distaste for leaving home at that festive season, for the future. I told Grateman how it would be before we started; but he is always self-opinionated; and when he has 'the gout flying about him,' as he calls it, which he happened to have at the period in question (for I am sorry to say that although he eats fish in Lent, he does not confine himself to that article by any means), he is as obstinate as a mule.

'My good soul,' said I, persuasively, 'it is idle to think of "running down" to Sandcliff at Easter-time, at a moment's notice. The place is chokeful. We shall not find a roof to put our heads under; and even if we start by the first train, we cannot be down there till ten o'clock.'

'And plenty of time too,' interrupted he impatiently. 'The moon will be up, and the sea will be looking lovely. The doctors say I require "a thorough change," and the

sooner I get it the better. As for rooms, I'll telegraph to the hotel at once.'

We telegraphed accordingly, and the reply came back : 'Hotel quite full throughout the week ; no lodgings to be procured in the town.'

'That's all nonsense,' explained Grateman on the receipt of this discouraging intelligence. 'They're like the dog in the manger, these hotels : if they can't take one in themselves, they do all they can to hinder others from taking one in. Now, I tell you what I'll do. In order to ensure everything being in readiness for us when we arrive—for I don't deny the town may be full—I'll telegraph to Frank Surpliss ; fellow that was in my year at Oriel, and who lives at Sandcliff ; popular preacher there : wish I'd thought of it before.'

'You can rely upon him, can you ?'

'Of course I can. We were always in the same boat at college, and very literally, too, for he pulled stroke, and I pulled bow in the eight.' So he sat down and wrote : *From James Grateman, Colchicum Terrace, London, to Frank Surpliss, Clergyman, Sandcliff* ('Is that the way to put it, eh ? However, the clerk will make it right.') *Two bed-rooms and a sitting-room, somewhere, for to-night. Have some supper ready ; and join us.*—'There : if he is anything like what he was five years ago, he'll snap at that like a trout at a fly. So now, you see, you've got everything settled.'

If I had, Grateman had not. It takes a great deal to settle him comfortably when he has 'the gout flying about him.' He must have everything nice, and a good deal of it, and to the minute, or else his irritation does not confine itself to his toe. In travelling, particularly, he is at such periods hard to please. He must have the seat opposite to him in the railway carriage kept for the accommodation of his feet ; and if anybody ventures even into the next seat, his manner becomes unpleasant. On the present occasion, however, we secured a 'through' carriage to ourselves, by the judicious investment of a florin ; and Grateman took off his boots, and stowed away his many travelling appurtenances overhead and

underfoot, with that sense of security that fears no change. At the junction, where a train from another part of London was wont to meet our own, there was a great crowd of passengers, but the silver key which had secured our places had fastened our door, and we remained undisturbed throughout the usual time spent in stoppage. At the last moment, however, an official put his head in at the window, and cried out: 'Change, here. Make haste, gentlemen; there is not an instant to lose.'

'We want no change, man,' answered Grateman in the words of Montezuma, in *Pizarro*, and with much the same magnificent expression of countenance. 'We are booked through to Sandcliff.'

'We always change here at Easter-time, Sir; and you must hurry, *I* can tell you, if you don't wish to be left behind.'

Remonstrance, rage, and an everlasting rancour against the fellow who had so unconscientiously taken his florin, had to be suppressed for the time, while the unhappy Grateman huddled his chattels together, and *with his boots in his mouth* (I speak the literal truth), limped across the platform to the departing train. It was full of Easter excursionists, and yet even they resented his appearance and costume, and we only obtained places with the utmost difficulty, and to the great discontent of our fellow-travellers. I really don't think they were to blame for objecting to our society: it was not only that appearances were against my companion as to clothes; indignation, and the not being able to breathe with facility (through his boots), gave him a very truculent appearance. So soon as circumstances admitted of speech, he indulged for some minutes in indiscriminate invective, and then (his sense of humour overcoming his sense of wrong) suddenly burst into roars of laughter. The company evidently took him for a maniac; and when I endeavoured to calm him, it was equally clear that they set me down as his keeper. It was a long and wearisome journey, the train stopping everywhere, because it was Easter-time, and we did not arrive at Sandcliff till past ten at night. There was no Frank Surpliss to meet us, nor did the station-

master know his address, nor was there any message for us of any kind.

There was not even a fly to take us and our luggage ; for the town was as full of lodgers as an egg of meat, and no more were expected by the flymen. There was one very small omnibus, belonging to the *Black Horse Hotel*, from which we had received the unpromising telegram, and into that we crowded with four others—a man and his wife, who were in the same houseless position as ourselves : a stout old lady, whose absence would have been a relief, yet who observed that it really was not worth while for her to ride at all, since she had such a little way to go ; and a good-natured-looking young man, who unintentionally incurred our hate by stating that he was particularly fortunate, since he had not only a bed at the hotel, but friends in Alma Road, who could have taken him in had he wished it, only it was pleasanter at the hotel. When we reached the inn, we were of course informed that there was no room ; but the good-natured young man, after a short but sharp inward struggle, gave up his apartment to the married couple, and got into the 'bus again, the driver of which was instructed by us to try the other inn. This was a long way off, and the good-natured young man, conscious of self-sacrifice, thought it very hard that he was not taken to Alma Road. The stout old lady, too, reiterated her remark that she lived so near at hand that it was hardly worth while for her to ride. At the *Gray Mare* we were informed with triumph that it was fuller than its rival ; but that lodgings were to be procured in Babylon Terrace. This was a sort of hanging-garden half-way up the cliff, and took us twenty minutes to reach it, during which the good-natured young man grew very melancholy, and even the stout old lady murmured that 'if she had only know'd she would never have ridden.' At Babylon Terrace we were informed that 'the 'ouse was full—and no thanks to them people at the *Gray Mare*—a week ago and more.' It was now considerably past eleven, and Gratemans' expressive countenance was quite a picture. 'Let us order supper,' said he, 'at the inn, at all events.' But even

that idea failed to dissipate his gloomy forebodings, and he enquired significantly of the stout old lady, evidently with an eye to the worst, at what time in the morning the sun rose in those parts. We both, indeed, began to look at the 'bus with a view to its convenience as a sleeping apartment, and a most unpromising appearance it presented. 'I *do* wish he'd go to Alma Road,' muttered the once good-natured young man, with testy impatience; and, 'Well, I might ha' got to my place sooner on my own legs,' echoed our lady-companion.

At the *Gray Mare* we got out with our portmanteaus; and whether that poor young man ever got to Alma Road, or that old lady ever reached the home that lay so near, and yet seemed unapproachable, I know not. There is no space in these columns for any woes except our own. Our first act was to promise a mighty guerdon to 'the boots,' if only he should succeed in getting us apartments for the night; and off he started for that purpose, so sanguine and self-reliant, that we sat down to our late supper in tolerable spirits. But as the minutes flew by, and one after another of the inmates of the coffee-room went off to bed with a cheerful 'Good-night' to their friends, and the clock-hand drew near to midnight, and yet the boots returned not, we began to experience a collapse. The landlady had already offered us two sofas in the ladies' coffee-room, which Grateman had declined with thanks. Both of us might, under the circumstances, be said to be of a retiring disposition, but Grateman was particularly modest; and the idea of sleeping in an apartment devoted by day to the fair sex, and to which one of them might at any time return, having by chance forgotten something, was too much for his nerves. As time wore on, however, we began to think less delicately upon this matter, and sent out the waiter to say that we would have the sofas. The reply came back, that they had been taken since our arrival by two distinguished foreigners, who were already in occupation of them.

We had no hope that any good-natured young man at the *Gray Mare* would turn out for *us*; for we had already

become unpopular with the guests of that establishment. The few late sitters up in the coffee-room were of a genial, not to say convivial turn, and had endeavoured to enter into conversation with us; but we, engrossed by the terrible circumstances of our position, had rejected their advances; their well-meant and civil remarks about the weather and Mr. Disraeli had seemed but bald disjointed chat to us; and they, good lack! had taken the inattention of us poor houseless wanderers for pride. At midnight, the boots returned, dispirited, jaded, down-at-heel (if I may use the expression) with the news, that there was but one bed in the town, and that a very little one. Grateman and I looked at one another significantly as each produced a silver coin from his pocket. 'You toss, I cry,' said my companion gloomily. 'Tails.' I think by his tone he felt he was going to lose. The shilling came down with the blessed effigy of her gracious Majesty uppermost, and the vacant bed was mine.

'No,' said I, with a burst of magnanimity; 'you have the gout. Take it; enjoy it (I mean the bed); and never mind me.'

If a lover of human nature (whereas there was only the sleepy waiter) had been in that coffee-room, he could not have failed to be pleased at the ensuing spectacle; at the generous disinterestedness (although I say it who should be silent) upon the one side, and at the forbearance and disinclination to take advantage of a disinterested liberality upon the other. Grateman said it was he who had cajoled me down to Sandcliff; and indeed it was quite true that his ridiculous obstinacy and self-confidence had alone brought us to this dreadful pass. But I said: 'Pooh, pooh; we are equally to blame' (though that, of course, was absurd). The noble struggle as to who should suffer for both was really touching. At last, the unsympathetic waiter observed that the house was a-going to shut up, so we had to do the same. We left the *Gray Mare* (it looked quite white in the moonlight) in company with the still faithful, because unpaid boots, bearing a portmanteau in each hand. He dropped mine at my lodgings.

'And now, Sir, where am I to take yours?'

'That is the very question, boots, which you must decide for me,' replied Gratemán; and he placed in his hand a couple of half-crowns.

As though electrically moved by contact with the precious metal, this faithful retainer cried; 'Lor', Sir, I have it; and I might have had it an hour ago.' He was not referring to the money. He had really an idea. 'You shall sleep in a first-class carriage at the railway-station, Sir. I know the night-porter, Sir; and he will call you in the morning, and bring you your hot water just as snug as though you were with us. It's not at all unusual, when the town's chokeful, as it is now, I do assure you.'

Gratemán's features expressed no surprise, for he was so dead beat that he could have slept anywhere; and he confessed to me afterwards that he had had thoughts of a bathing-machine, numbers of which we had passed drawn up in a field, like a herd of amphibious beasts, awaiting the arrival of the summer season. But, in his helpless condition, I could not but see him safely housed, or rather carried. The night porter seemed pleased to have a guest, and placing a board between the opposite seats, and putting a cushion upon it, made up a tolerable *extempore* bed in a couple of minutes. Instead of bed-clothes, my friend had our two railway rugs; and altogether, if it was not luxurious accommodation, it was better than being 'lodged' like corn, by the wind and rain, which might have happened to him.

'I shall have to call you early, Sir,' said his chamberlain with a grin, 'because this carriage goes with the early parliamentary to London;' and so we left him, already half asleep, with his gout and his railway rugs flying about him.

Perhaps you will think me unfeeling and sardonic in the above description of my friend's sleeping arrangements; but when you have read what happened to *me* that night, you will perceive that I have reason to be envious of Gratemán, and therefore unsympathising. His rest was destined to be Sardanapalitan compared to

mine. I make no reflection on the bed, which was soft, nor on its furniture, which was clean, nor on the apartment itself, which the boots had with so much diligent toil secured for me. I will even allow that Mrs. Binks, the landlady, was not only buxom, but kindly, and not at all 'put out' by my exceedingly late arrival; and yet it was something in her appearance that first gave me the notion that all was not right in No. 4, Paradise Gardens. 'I *hope* you will be comfortable, Sir,' said she fervently, when she wished me good-night; but there was that in her tone which seemed to add, 'although I shall be uncommonly surprised if you are.'

But the room, as I have said, was a comfortable room enough, on the ground-floor, and communicating by folding-doors with the little dining-room, in the grate of which a cheerful fire was burning; and I felt thankful for warmth and shelter, and not disposed to entertain suspicions and forebodings. I disrobed myself with deliberation, and sat in my dressing-gown smoking a pipe or two, and reading in the *Metaphysical Magazine* one of my own articles, which is the very pleasantest sort of reading I know, until one o'clock, and then with a nod of satisfaction, and the confidential remark, 'What an uncommonly intelligent writer this is!' I got into bed, and fell asleep in a moment: nothing but the extraordinary merit of the literature could have kept me awake so long.

I don't know how many hours or minutes I had been asleep, but something suddenly roused me to acute consciousness; there was no touch, no sound; but 'that wonderful sense of human companionship which strikes through sleep and trance, and maybe even death itself,* warned me that there was another person in the room; another 'sympathetic member of the great United Family of Man,* unless, indeed (which delicacy forbade me to imagine) it was a lady. As I gazed with straining eyes before me, the blackness of night faded into gloom, and in the gloom I saw a misty figure standing by the chest

* Something of this sort was in the article above referred to; and I cannot resist the temptation of a quotation or two. Authors will easily forgive me; and the general public cannot but be the better for it.

of drawers on which I had placed my watch and money.

‘Who are you?’ cried I, in a terrible voice (for fear is a thing unknown to me!)

There was no reply. I repeated my enquiry in still more determined accents, and then a tremulous voice answered: ‘Oh, Sir, don’t ’ee tell Mr. Binks; but I am Mrs. Binks.’

Can you imagine anything more embarrassing than my position? ‘The mind, stored with historical incidents, rushes with lightning speed over the past,* but finds no parallel to my awful position later than that of the esteemed patriarch Joseph. ‘Oh, don’t ’ee, don’t ’ee tell Mr. Binks,’ repeated the quavering tones, and this time they were so very tremulous that I felt that not even a misplaced infatuation for myself could have so transformed my landlady’s straightforward if somewhat melancholy speech. It was certainly not the Mrs. Binks whom I had seen who thus addressed me.

‘Wicked woman!’ cried I, ‘who are you?’

‘Oh Sir, don’t ’ee tell Mr. Binks, but I am Mrs. Binks.’

‘You old Poll parrot,’ said I, angrily (for I now perceived that her voice was cracked with age), ‘leave this room immediately, or I will send for the police.’

‘I’ll go and sit in the parlour, Sir,’ responded she meekly, and she opened one of the folding-doors and closed it behind her. As she did so, the light from the embers, which were still glowing, disclosed to me an ancient female, nearer a hundred than any other round number, and with a head that shook not so much with the palsy of age, as with that of mental imbecility. It was plain to me at once that my untimely visitor had survived her wits. Poor old lady! I repented already of having spoken to her so harshly; but I also regretted that there was no lock to my door. However, overcome with fatigue, I placed a heavy chair against the door of communication, which opened inwards, and fell once more into a sound sleep. The unwilling movement of this obstacle over the carpet awoke me at dawn. The ancient female, tired of her own company, was evidently

again about to present herself; and she did so. Daylight became her, poor soul, even less than firelight. She looked more than a hundred now, and if I might compare the human form divine with that of the feathered creation, she bore a most extraordinary resemblance to a moulting cockatoo.

‘My good lady,’ said I, in a tone (I hope) of gentlemanly remonstrance, ‘this sort of thing will not do. If *you* can go without sleep, *I* can’t. What *are* you coming here for, and what *does* it all mean?’

‘Oh Sir, don’t ‘ee tell——’

‘Yes, I will,’ cried I, sharply; ‘I’ll tell Mr. Binks. If you don’t leave my room *instantly*, and promise never to enter it again, I’ll tell Binks as sure as your name’s whatever it is.’

But long before I had concluded this fortunately imagined menace, the poor lost creature had taken herself off in alarm, and I heard her stockinged feet slide along the passage, and go wearily down the kitchen stairs.

But I could not get to sleep again, and might for that matter just as well have passed the night in the small omnibus. I lay long, however, and rose to a late breakfast, so that it much surprised me not to see Grateman, whom circumstances, I knew, must have compelled to rise hours before, and who had promised to be with me at that meal. When I told the waiting-maid what had happened to me, she did not seem at all surprised.

‘That’s master’s mother,’ explained she. ‘Being quite mad, she is put to sleep in the back-kitchen, only sometimes she goes wandering over the house at night like a bad sperrit. Lodgers, like yourself, don’t like it; and that’s why this house is always the last in Sandcliff to be let.’

‘But, poor thing,’ said I, ‘if she is mad, why be angry with her?’

‘She aint more mad than she is wicked, Sir,’ responded the abigail darkly: then added, with intense unction, ‘Drat her!’

I saw that there was mystery enough in No. 4 Paradise Gardens to account for any amount of melancholy in

Mrs. Binks the younger ; that she was more unfortunate in her mother-in-law even than most people, was abundantly clear ; but not being a commissioner in lunacy, I did not venture to push my enquiries. Besides, there was pressing matter for my attention in the absence of Grateman. What *could* have become of him ? True, the morning was beautiful, and might well have tempted him for a stroll, but not with those tender feet of his, for a four hours' walk, unless the 'complete change' had already altered my friend beyond all recognition. At ten o'clock I started for the railway station, still expecting to meet him at every turn of the road ; on my arrival at the terminus, I found the night-porter had gone home for the day, and that nobody new anything about Grateman. The station-master derided the idea that anybody could have been accommodated with a bed in a first-class carriage, and delicately insinuated that I was one of those who rise early in the morning to follow strong drinks.

I gave him my card to let him know that he was dealing with a public character ; and he grew very respectful at once. 'There's a telegram just come for you, Sir,' said he ; 'only we didn't know your address, although, of course, we are well acquainted with your *name*.'

This was pleasant of the man, and I nodded affably. The telegram was from Grateman, and ran as follows : 'I am at home again. That infernal rascal forgot to call me, and I never woke till the train arrived at London Bridge. A very impudent letter from that fellow Surpliss, who "pays no attention to telegrams during the Easter season." Gout flying about me worse than ever ; I never mean to go to Sandcliff again.'

As for myself, I don't go so far as to say that ; but if I do ever visit Sandcliff, I shall—until I receive some trustworthy intimation of the decease of Mrs. Binks the elder—avoid No. 4, Paradise Gardens, where the boots engaged for me My Last Lodgings.



THE DEMON FERRY-BOAT.

A STORY OF THE THAMES.



QF all the pleasures which have kept their ground in the affections of the children of men, from the days when the waters were separated from the dry land until now, there is surely nothing to which so much credit is due for the tenacity of its hold on public favour, as the pastime of fishing. For other pleasures may be fleeting, perhaps, and empty, and a number of other deprecatory adjectives (for which, see the Moralists *passim*), but still they are not so utterly disappointing, so certain to result in complete and inglorious failure, so delusive even in the modest joys which they profess to bestow, as is this insidious sport. If Noah himself ever angled out of the windows of the Ark, you may depend upon it, not only that he caught little or nothing, but that he invented some charitable excuse for his want of success—most probably that ‘there was too much water for bottom-fishing.’

The occupation of the professional fisherman—by which I mean the man who persuades amateurs to go out with him in his smack to that ‘likely’ piece of blue water off the headland, or in his punt to ‘that there sand-bank,’ which is also, if you are to believe his word, a gudgeon-shoal—I say the occupation of this deceiver, whether he be salt or fresh, would have gone long since, but for some benevolent arrangement (a monopoly instituted by Nature for his sole behoof,) through which mankind is rendered

blind to his shallow arts, and the experience of his perfidy profits us nothing. This is the only explanation that can be given of the fanaticism which prompts otherwise humane persons to pay ten-and-sixpence a day to watch this amphibious rascal impale lobworms or live minnows (as the case may be) on to their hooks, with the expectation (scarcely ever realised) that these creatures may, by their dying agonies, attract fish to the same dreadful doom. Nay, this gross favouritism of Dame Nature is carried still further; fishermen are almost always made to appear more mild and harmless than any other class of their fellow-creatures; they are neither voracious (being quite content with bread and cheese and beer, if 'the party' has brought nothing else out with him), nor exacting in their charges—like cabmen and others who keep land-carriages; so that we naturally 'cotton' to them, as the phrase goes, and put a confidence in their assurances, which might be reposed to about as much advantage in American securities. I protest I would as soon expect to receive the full value of a greenback in hard cash, as to see the word of a fisherman literally kept with respect to either the quality or the quantity of any probable capture. Yet so positive are they beforehand, that no person of ordinary humility dares question the matter; and after the result has proved them fallible, they are so furnished with arguments to account for the unprecedented failure, that it is impossible to abuse them as one would wish.

The salt-water angling imposture is worse than that of the river, inasmuch as to the pangs of disappointment are added the perils of the deep, and the unspeakable horrors of sea-sickness. How often have I sat at anchor off that 'likely' headland, while the tide was coming in, or while it was running out, or while it was neither one nor t' other, but 'slack,' with my miserable head hanging over the vessel's side, and a line with three hooks at the end of it—like the arms (which are legs) of the Isle of Man—in my soddlen and nerveless hand!

Upon my way to that promising anchorage, I have been beset with terrors of a watery grave, of being cut in twain by steamers, or driven out to sea and swamped by the

ever rising gale ; but now I have lost all fear and almost all feeling.

‘Just touch the line with your forefinger, Sir ; it’s ten to one but you will bring up summut now,’ observes the insidious boatman. ‘Shall I put you on another lob-worm ?’

‘No, no, no,’ I say ; ‘take away that horrid object. Why did you tell me that we should feel no motion out here ? I have been two hours in this wretched state, and not had so much as a bite.’

‘Well, it’s curious now,’ returns the deceiver, with quite a philosophic air. ‘There was three gents came from London yesterday, and I brought ’em to this very spot, and it was as smooth here as the back of yer hand, bless yer ; and as for whitin’, why they couldn’t put their lines in fast enough. Now, I’ll be bound for it, if you’ll come here to-morrow ——’

I interrupt him with a shudder. ‘Very likely, my good man ; it is exceedingly probable ; but in the meantime, let us go home to-day, and at once.’

I speak sarcastically, resolutely determined, while I retain my reason, never to come line-fishing again ; yet within a week, or a month at most, of that detestable experience, I once more become the victim of some designing mariner, and am terrified, and made very unwell, and catch nothing whatever—all over again. And so it is with respect to river-fishing ; the peril and the pains indeed are wanting, but, on the other hand, the failure of success is much more frequent ; for though we are not all, thank Heaven ! within easy reach of the deep-sea fisheries, most of us are within a few hours’ walk of some river ; and when we are not—such is the fascinating character of this hopeless pursuit—we are generally induced to drive thither for at least one day’s fishing.

Let me recall the incidents of my last piscatorial expedition ; I do not say by way of warning, since warning is altogether thrown away upon the devotees of this pastime, who literally kiss the rod that corrects them, but because it presents some features which are not to be found (I fancy) in all other narratives of the like kind.

In the first place, Nature had been good enough to remove our place of abode as far as possible from all temptation to go a-fishing, there being neither stream nor lake within driving distance, and the river Thames happily separated from us by many miles of downland, without any visible road. Yet such is the marvellous attraction of this hateful sport, that four of us last week decided upon overweighting a dog-cart, and making an expedition across these desolate wilds in quest of gudgeon. I have said that there were no roads, but I do not mean it to be inferred that there were therefore no ruts; far from it. I don't know whether those in front or behind were most to be pitied. Those who sat in front suffered more protracted agonies of terror in the contemplation of the shock to come; but those behind endured more physical pain, being taken unprepared, and shot out (when they did fall) with considerable violence. Moreover, although there were handposts, there was nothing left of them *except* the posts, the fingers having been broken off by time or tempest. Once only did we come upon a legible direction. Long before we got up to it, we could see that the thing was unmutilated, and rejoiced thereat not a little; for we had gone astray already two or three times, being enticed by cottages where we hoped to obtain information, but which we always found entirely unoccupied, it being harvest-time; and once we went three hundred yards out of our way to enquire of a very cunningly-contrived scarecrow, keeping guard over a wheat-field in a manner to deceive not only birds but men. Conceive, then, our disappointment to read, neatly engraved upon this finger-post—for which we had made at a good pace, and with the highest expectations—the worse than meaningless words *No Thoroughfare*. Our horse, too, perhaps with a superstitious idea of procuring better luck—here cast a shoe, and we had to walk for the rest of the journey whether we took right ways or wrong. At last, we reached Mildred-on-Thames.

Now, among the other peculiarities of the pastime of fishing, there is this one, that in the preparations beforehand, the most essential matters, as in the case of a pic-

nic, are almost always left behind. If you bring rods enough, you don't bring lines; and if you bring lines, there are no hooks; and if even all these things are as they should be, two hours are wasted in procuring worms, which, after all (as we are subsequently informed by the deceiver), are the cause of our total failure to catch anything. 'Lor bless ye, they won't bite nothin' just now but gentles.'*

Now, upon this occasion, we had been assured that it was wholly unnecessary to bring any instruments of pisci-capture with us to Mildred, since such articles were supplied in profusion at the *Beetle and Wedge*, which also was the ferryhouse—a pleasant little place, as all river-inns are, quite overgrown with flowering creepers, and with a tiny garden sloping down to the water-side. However, when we drove up to this fairy residence, and perceived no vestige of any punts or pleasure-boats, flopping idly against the little wooden jetty, I observed to the landlord, not without some apprehension: 'You have lots of boats, of course?'

'Not one, Sir; nor yet half a one' (as if we should have gone out in *that*). 'They are all engaged—unless, indeed, you would like to take the ferry-boat.'

He pointed to a mass of timber about fifty feet long by thirty wide, used for the transit of heavy vehicles. It was just such a sort of raft as the elephants of the ancients used to be persuaded to step upon, under the impression that it was dry land; in modern times it could have had no parallel save in the Floating Bridge at Portsmouth. The idea of navigation seemed to be altogether out of the question.

'At least,' said I, 'we can fish from the land; you have plenty of rods and lines, I suppose?'

'Not a rod and line to be got in the place, Sir,' responded the landlord decisively.

'This is charming,' observed I, with the hollow laugh of despair. 'You will tell us next that there is not a

* The deceiver always 'blesses' us, a certain sort of saintliness and conciliation being generally kneaded up with his roguery—like-ground-bait.

blacksmith — for we've cast a shoe — to be found in Mildred.'

'Nor more there aint,' returned the landlord seriously; 'but there's one over in Oxfordshire yonder'—he pointed across the river to some unseen spot a little short of the horizon—'and we can send the ferry over for he.'

They sent the ferry for he accordingly—and a wonderful sight it was to see it go—and the messenger returned (after an interval which we consumed in lunch), not only with the blacksmith, but with a fisherman and the implements of his trade. They were not good implements, the rods having rheumatism in their joints, and the lines being rather rotten; moreover, the fisherman was the oldest man that ever bobbed for gudgeon, and had forgotten everything connected with his trade—save how to deceive. However, in our extreme desolation, we were glad to get him. Nothing could be more convenient, he said, than to go a-fishing in the ferry-boat itself, which might be punted by a single man, who understood the business, with ease. As I was a married man, I considered myself disqualified to compete for this privilege; but my three friends did manage, among them, by means of an enormous pole tipped with iron, to persuade the thing to move. We made our way up-stream, lest otherwise we should suffer ourselves to be carried with the tide beyond recovery. After a majestic progress, at the rate of a yard a minute, of about fifty yards, this Ancient Fisherman discovered that we had no anchor on board, nor any other means of mooring the machine; whereupon we returned to the inn, and borrowed of the hostess a little ornament used for measuring coal, and weighing exactly one hundredweight, of which she begged us to take especial care. Having procured an iron chain to match this pretty trinket, we fastened them together very securely, and having arrived at the spot indicated as being the best upon the river, we managed by our united exertions to hoist the thing overboard. This would doubtless have anchored us well enough, but for the incompleteness of our preliminary arrangements. A chain, say the mathematicians, is only as strong as its

weakest link ; and if the strongest chain in the world is not fastened to that which it is intended to retain, it will not retain it. Now this was unhappily the case with our anchor and cable. They were securely enough connected with one another, but not with the ferry-boat ; and at this moment they repose together at the bottom of the river, and doubtless give a chalybeate flavour to all Thames water between them and the sea.

After this misfortune we dared not return to the *Beetle and Wedge*, but fastened our raft to the bank, whereby we found (rather to our mortification) that we could command identically the same waters after which we had been striving so long, and at so tremendous a sacrifice. It is unnecessary to relate the details of our complete failure to capture fish in the most likely spot on the river ; one of our party did catch one perch of a deep yellow colour, and which I would not have eaten for a good deal of money ; but after about three hours of it, we paid our ancient mariner, and bade him go his way, murmuring that no fish ever did bite before evening, and promising us more gudgeons than we could carry if we would only persevere until nightfall.

Relieved of this incubus, and of the one hundredweight and chain, our raft moved less majestically up stream, by villa and church, by osier bed and shallow, under bridges over which the train flew thundering, while the martins peeped forth secure from their mud-nests between arch and parapet ; meeting many a pleasure-boat, and especially one fitted up for a river-voyage, with an extempore cabin, wherein we could see the preparations for a banquet, and ladies employed in deftly mixing salad and making claret cup—both excellent arts in women ; then up a back-stream, paved with water-lilies, and lit with glancing dragon-flies, to a solitary weir head, where was deep water and shade—a bathing-place of nature's own. Now, while my young friends clove the stream with skilful arms, it struck me, remaining in the huge ferry-boat, with nothing but their clothes for company, that I would gather water-lilies, to gladden the eyes of the dear ones left at home. Engaged, then, in this poetical occupation, I did

not observe the flowery banks gliding quietly by me, and the rushes nodding their mute adieu, till a sudden cry arose from one of the bathers: 'Take care you don't get swept away by the stream!' In an instant I had seized the gigantic punt-pole—a 'weaver's beam' tipped with iron—and thrust it with all my force into the stream. It did its office to the extent of sticking there well enough; but as for holding the ferry-boat also, that was altogether another matter. I held on as long as I could; but since the question at once became, whether I should stay in the slowly-separating boat, or remain in mid-stream along with the punt-pole, I adopted the former alternative. The cry of agony with which my three unclothed friends greeted this misfortune, still rings in my ears. 'Throw our things on shore, for Heaven's sake!' shrieked one. Alas, he had more presence of mind than I had. I dashed at the nearest heap of clothes, and threw the first article of apparel towards the receding bank as hard as I could. I watched its fate with enthralling interest; it fell short, but was caught by a willow branch, and there most happily it hung. But, after all, how insufficient was such an article for three persons who had not a rag of clothing among them. It was only a summer scarf, of the sort that is called *Dundreary*, and not a button to fasten it to among them all! I cannot imagine any position more embarrassing than that in which those three young gentlemen were placed except my own.

This had by this time began to engage my whole attention. I was, of course, perfectly powerless to guide as to arrest my unwieldy craft, which, having already gained the main stream, was now floating down at a pace which I could not have believed possible, from its performances in the other direction. I had once been witness of a dreadful accident to one of those huge timber-rafts upon the Rhine, which, becoming unmanageable, ran against the great bridge of boats at Coblenz, and broke it up, and drowned half a score of passengers; but the bridge which I was now approaching was *not* one of timber, but of bricks and mortar; and if there should be a concussion, it would not be *it*, but my raft which would go to pieces.

I ran up and down my floating prison like a caged jackal ; I shouted to some people in a neighbouring harvest-field, who shouted back again ' Good-night ! good-night ! ' under the idea that I, on my part, had only uttered that little civility. In another moment the machine struck the buttress of the centre arch, and whirled round with hideous velocity : my vessel was too strong to suffer serious damage ; but from the moment of its receiving this rotary impulse, it proceeded by huge circles, making me giddy, although I sat in the very centre of the machine. The punts and pleasure-boats scuttled away to left and right at my approach, like dace when a jack bears down upon them, and in reply to my calls for aid, I was saluted with nothing but menaces and imprecations. I supposed they thought that I was a rich man voyaging alone by my own desire, and with three changes of raiment. At the ferry, popular indignation seemed to be at its height, for since we had taken the passage-boat, nobody could get across from Berks to Oxfordshire, or *vice versâ* ; and there was a howling crowd of expectant passengers upon both banks. I am sure I would very gladly have stopped at either, but the remorseless machine whirled on past its usual resting-place with unabated speed. And now, a most awful catastrophe awaited me and my demon craft. The pleasure-boat with the deck-cabin which I have already spoken of, lay right before me, *moored* in the centre of the stream. It was so ingeniously fastened there, that it would have taken at least a quarter of an hour to unloose it, and lo ! I was revolving within two minutes of it at furthest, bringing with me inevitable destruction. The happy inmates were at present in total ignorance of what was about to happen. I could hear the popping of a champagne cork, and the silver laughter of youth, as I drew nigh. The wind being my way, I could smell the very pickled salmon and cucumber, and the Chili vinegar, which had (very properly) been mixed with the salad. My mouth (which would otherwise have watered at these preparations) was dry and voiceless ; I could not speak for terror, but I threw up both my arms like a mad semaphore. Fortunately, one of them caught sight of me, and

instantly all hurried to the bows. In another second, crash, splinter, smash. Total unconsciousness supervened.

When I came to myself, I found myself in the hands of two of the rural constabulary, who were disputing as to whether the offence—running down with damage, but without loss of life—had been committed in Oxfordshire or Berks. However, I was glad to find myself on dry land under any circumstances whatever. All misfortunes, no matter how frightful, are settled sooner or later, and the four of us returned home (later), safe and sound and clothed, in our dog-cart that same evening, after all. It has even been already darkly suggested that we should try another day's fishing.





DICK'S LEGACY.

IF we were a large family, and it was only to be expected that one of us should have insisted upon going to sea. My father said he would as soon have seen Dick go to the dogs at once, but we all knew he didn't mean that. He only meant it was very hard that his favourite son, and the child of his old age, should not be content to earn his living at home, or at least in his own country, but must betake himself to lands which the rest of us had only read of in the geography books. We lived in London, and within a very easy distance of the Thames—indeed, our street led into it—but nothing would do but Dick must sail to Spain and see the Guadalquivir—a name that sounds like an alligator *in extremis*. Our Dick cared nothing for foreign scenery, had no thirst for information of any kind, didn't care whether the climate was warm or cold, hadn't the slightest knowledge of any tongue but his own (and *that* he knew very imperfectly), had no sympathy with Columbus or Captain Cook—and yet he must be always going to sea. Going to see *what?* his father used to enquire peevishly; and poor Dick never could answer him, for he didn't know himself. He always pined to be off somewhere, to Kamtchatka, or Mozambique, or Jericho, after he had been at home about three weeks or so. Spain not having been enough for him, he ran over to Canada;

then he took a trip to Hong-kong ; and finally went to the West Indies—from whence the dear light-hearted vagabond never returned.

Yellow Jack laid him low at Berbice, and many an eye was touched with tears when the news came over the sea. It sent a spasm to his father's heart from which it never recovered. For this Ne'er-do-well, who was no Scape-grace, however, was liked by everybody who knew him. He was very poor, of course, being only a common seaman before the mast, at best ; but he had kept all his friends in his memory wheresoever he went, and brought home some trifle from every outlandish place he visited, for one or other of them. He was not a man for a woman to marry—unless she was prepared to embrace the nautical profession as well as himself—but he was an immense favourite with all the sex ; and as for children, they adored him, and called him Uncle Dick whether authorised by the tables of affinity so to do, or not. His last present, a posthumous one, brought over by a messmate to my wife, with 'her Brother Dick's best love'—kind simple soul that he was!—was a huge black parrot, the very ugliest bird that these eyes ever beheld. Lucy, however, welcomed it as though it had been a bird of paradise, for the sake of the giver ; and father could hardly be persuaded not to have it in his room, when he lay ill of the sickness which at last was unto death. But the fact was the black parrot was by no means a suitable bird for a sick-room ; for at most unexpected seasons, and commonly in the dead of night, it would begin to talk as loud as a washer-woman, and use the most reprehensible language, which it had picked up at sea—upon its return-voyage, as my wife always would have it, and by no means from Dick's lips. 'Pooh, pooh !' 'Never say die !' 'What's o'clock ? past kissing-time—chick, chick—and time to kiss again—chick, chick !' [That was his imitation of osculation.] 'Tolderol, tolderol !!' 'Who's afraid ?' 'Kill the captain !' 'Scuttle the ship !'—and a number of other objectionable statements, which would be not only tedious here to enumerate, but even improper. Notwithstanding this, Poll was a great pet with everybody (except the doctor,

whom it had objurgated in the most unmeasured terms, having mistaken him, in his white cravat, for the ship's chaplain), and when misfortune came upon us, in the pleasant guise, however, of a family too large for our income, Poll and his huge gilt cage still formed a portion of our furniture, although many persons with more brain than heart thought it a piece of folly that we did not turn Dick's loving legacy into hard money. The only inconvenience Poll suffered in consequence of this change in our circumstances, was that, being greatly crowded within doors, we hung him outside the house in the summer-time, in which position he endured much wordy persecution from the street-boys. To these he would return insult for insult, teaching them the badinage used by mariners, and learning in return the flowers of speech that flourish in the streets of the metropolis. His jet-black plumage, his enormous beak, and the unprecedented (for a parrot) violence of his expressions, induced these enemies to call him Nick; but very fortunately his ear was not sufficiently acute to discern the difference between this contumelious name, and Dick, which we had entitled him, after him who had bequeathed him to us.

But 'Never you mind,' my good father would observe to us, with general reference to all these drawbacks; 'that bird will prove a blessing to you yet, or my dear boy would never have sent it to you with his last breath across the seas.'

And so, long after my poor father died, and when many of our children had grown up and were earning their own living, the parrot was with us still, without one touch of gray upon a feather.

We were outfitting Jack, our youngest but one, for a situation as under-clerk in a colliery down in Wales, and had had no little trouble to raise the money for that and his long journey, when Dick first brought us luck.

'My dear George,' said my wife to me one June evening, just after I had come home from a long day's work, 'if fifteen guineas would be a very great comfort to you indeed, I know where to get them.'

Her voice was not so cheery as her words, and there-

fore I knew there was a reverse side to such a gratifying offer.

‘Well,’ said I, ‘and what’s to be done for that money? It would be a great convenience, Lucy, no doubt, just now.’

‘That’s true,’ returned my wife with a little sigh. ‘But we are not so poor as to be obliged to sell poor Dick even for that sum; and it is for him that the money has been bid. If any of the children were ill, and wanted expensive medicines, or change of air, I should not hesitate about it; but since we have cut, and contrived, and scraped together enough to start our Jack, I think we should not be justified, eh, George——’

My wife spoke with indecision, but she would secretly have been much disappointed in me, if I had leaned towards selling the bird, I knew; so I replied that that must not be thought of—certainly not—and enquired, merely as a matter of curiosity, how the offer happened to be made.

‘Well,’ said my wife, ‘Sally called me down stairs this afternoon, as I was taking a last look to Jack’s clothes, and especially to his buttons, poor lad—for it is not likely that any Welshwoman will understand such things—and who should be in the parlour but a female in widow’s clothes, sitting at our table with the parrot before her, like a poor savage worshipping an idol. She had taken it down from its hook outside, and carried it in, notwithstanding that it had sworn at her in a manner dreadful to listen to, and was even then far from pacified.

“Madam, I beg your pardon,” exclaimed the visitor; “but this parrot is the most admirable bird——”

“Pooh, pooh!” cried Dick.

“Its sagacity,” pursued the widow, “is beyond all belief. Now, I dote upon parrots, especially black ones, that having been my beloved husband’s favourite colour. And if I could only get possession of this admirable creature——”

“Kill the captain!—scuttle the ship!” screamed Dick.

“By paying any compensation in reason, I should consider myself truly fortunate. Of course, I’m taking a

great liberty. I have no right to come into your house and open a negotiation of this kind—I am fully aware of the false position in which I have placed myself—still, a voice from beyond the tomb seems to have whispered to me——”

“Tolderolol!” exclaimed Dick, performing a succession of somersaults within his gilded ring. “Who’s your hatter? How’s your poor feet?”

“Seems to have whispered,” repeated the widow, calmly waiting until the bird had finished its remarks: ‘Buy that parrot; buy it, cage and all. Take it home, and treat it kindly.’ It is impossible for me, Madam, to neglect such a solemn intimation of the wishes of the departed. Five pounds for the bird, and two ten for the cage, is an offer which I think you will allow is handsome, and ought to be conclusive.” And with these words she took out her purse, and laid down the money on the table.

‘I confess, George, that the sight of so much gold was not a little tempting; but after just one look at it, I thanked her, and bade her put it back again, for that with us also the matter was one of feeling and memory, and that we could not part with Dick upon any such consideration.

“Ten for the bird, and five for the cage,” observed the visitor with quiet distinctness, and doubling the sum already spread before me. I hesitated a moment, fairly fascinated by the glitter of all this treasure. I thought of a score of things that it would buy for you and the children, and did not know what to do.

“Poor Dick, poor Dick, poor Dick!” reiterated the parrot mournfully. “Give him a dozen, keel-haul him, throw him overboard!”

“Madam,” cried I, “I cannot sell that bird; so, please, do not tempt me any further.”

‘Well, Lucy, and you did quite right,’ quoth I, kissing away a tear that lay upon her honest cheek. ‘And then I suppose the temptress took herself off?’

‘No,’ returned my wife, ‘she did not; and here comes the strangest part of the story, and that which may have

most interest for you and me. "Well, if you won't sell your parrot," said the widow, in the same determined way as before, and without any appearance of disappointment, "will you *lend* it to me for a week in August next? I will give you ten guineas for the loan of it."

'*Lend* it, Lucy !'

'That is certainly what she said, George ; and I replied that I would speak to you, and if she would call to-morrow, at ten o'clock, let her know to what decision you had come.'

At first, I thought this offer could not have proceeded from any but a madwoman, and made up my mind to refuse her request. She might do some harm to our parrot, and possibly even eat it ; in which case, the law itself could afford us no redress. But, on second thoughts, I determined to see the woman myself, before rejecting so favourable a proposition. Accordingly, I delayed going to my usual place of business the next day until after the hour named by the mysterious visitor. As the clock struck ten, she rang the door-bell, and telling Sally not to be in a hurry in opening it, I made a recognizance through the parlour blind.

The widow's cap framed a quiet resolute face, and hard blue eyes, that certainly exhibited no trace of insanity ; her voice, as she spoke to the servant, was calm and collected ; her garments were new and of good material. If appearances were to be trusted, she was not mad, and she was solvent—the two points about which I had naturally the greatest solicitude.

'Mr. Wilson, I conclude ?' observed she, as she entered the parlour. 'I am glad that I see you in person, so that there need be no more uncertainty about this little affair. I offered your wife ten guineas for the loan of your black parrot from the 6th to the 13th of August. I think that is a handsome week's rent for any bird.'

'Madam,' returned I, 'that is undoubtedly true ; still, the proposition is such a very uncommon one, that you must pardon my hesitation in acceding to it. How do I know——'

'If you require references as guarantees of my respecta-

bility,' interrupted the widow, 'you may have a bushel of them. My name is Hubble, I live at 88 $\frac{1}{2}$, Pitt Street. I was housekeeper to the late General Sir Fiddle Faddle for twenty years ; and my bankers are the Messrs. Child. If you are merely curious to know why I want your parrot, that curiosity will not be gratified. Don't be a fool, now. I am prepared to pay five guineas at once, on deposit, and in advance, to convince you that my intentions are in good faith. What would you have more ?'

'Nothing more, indeed,' said I, taking up the money. 'I am perfectly satisfied. But supposing that in the interim the poor parrot should——'

'Never say die !' exclaimed Dick from his cage without. 'Who's afraid ? Chick, chick, chick, chick, chick !'

I could not help laughing heartily at this apropos interruption, but the widow never moved a muscle. 'If it dies, you may keep the deposit. It is hard,' added she with a sort of spasm, 'that poor folks should be disappointed in their expectations, through no fault of their own ; but as for their giving money back again, I think nobody ought to expect it. I have nothing further to remark except that the whole arrangement is to be kept a dead secret. That may seem very whimsical perhaps, but then I am prepared to pay for my whims. It will be better that one of you two should both bring Dick to Pitt Street, and take him away again, and for this trouble, you shall have a guinea extra.' She rose to leave the room, but while I held the door open for her, she suddenly observed : 'By-the-bye, I don't like the name of Dick ; it's vulgar. Have you any nice little boy at home who has nothing particular to do, and will teach the parrot to speak of himself as "Poor Tommy, Poor Tommy ?" It is very easily done, and here is a little present for his future tutor.'

She was gone in a moment, leaving in my wife's hand a half-sovereign wrapped up in silver-paper ; and all my apprehensions as to the state of her mind returned to me immediately with redoubled force. 'She *must* be mad,' thought I, 'to scatter her gold about with such reckless

profusion, and to entertain the idea that Tommy is a more aristocratic name than Dick !'

Nevertheless, the method of her madness being far from objectionable, and her references turning out to be most satisfactory, everything was done in accordance with the widow's desire. Our youngest hope, incited by the magnitude of his reward, never ceased his monotonous task until the unfortunate bird was so far educated that if he did not substitute his new name for his old one, he at least used one as often as the other, and very often both in the same breath ; and when the 6th of August came, I took him in a cab to Pitt Street in a high state of exultation and strong language, and under the belief, as I think, that he was about to be shipped for the West Indies. On the 13th, I brought him back again as glossy and bright as ever, and with the sum of £6 6s. in my waistcoat pocket, as well as the price of the two cabs. Not a feather of him was missing ; he was as ugly, but not at all more so—which, indeed, was scarcely possible—than when he left us. What he had done to earn his hire, we could not possibly imagine. When we asked him, he answered ' Fiddle Faddle ; ' a reply which at first quite terrified us by its sagacious novelty, but presently we remembered that that had been the name of the general whose housekeeper the widow had been, and set it down merely as a new acquisition to Dick's vocabulary. For fifteen years, I took that parrot to Pitt Street, and received the eleven guineas *per annum*, and although we suffered much—especially Lucy—from the pangs of ungratified curiosity, we had certainly cause to bless that sable bird. Our pecuniary connection with Mrs. Hubble did not make us in any degree more acquainted with her ; she received and dismissed me always with the same frigid politeness ; and when I met her by chance in the street, at other times, she made two stereotyped enquiries—first after Tommy's health, and secondly, after that of my wife.

In the sixteenth year after our first loan of the parrot, and in the month of July, we received a visit from two strange gentlemen, which was even more extraordinary in

its result than that of the mysterious widow. It took place upon a Saturday afternoon, when I was accustomed to leave my employer's house at an earlier hour than usual, so that I happened to be at home: had my wife been alone, she expresses her opinion that the interview would have been too much for her, and have cost her her reason.

As it was, her head—to use her own words—‘turned round like a teetotum,’ and ‘she saw sparks,’ which it seems is a premonitory sign of mental aberration.

And, judge now, whether, under the circumstances, this was to be wondered at.

These two gentlemen, being strangers, and attired in sober garments, having rung the bell, lifted down the parrot, whose cage as usual hung outside the ground-floor window, and brought it with them into the parlour.

‘You must excuse our freedom,’ observed the elder of the two, who had a stiff white cravat, and looked like a family lawyer; ‘but Tommy is a very old friend of ours, and we have known him a great deal longer than you have.’

‘Indeed, gentlemen!’ said I. ‘Then that must have been in the West Indies.’

‘I knew him there intimately well,’ returned the second gentleman, who was tightly buttoned up, and carried his head high, like a military man. The general won him at piquet, of the lieutenant-governor of Barbadoes, having staked, upon his side, fifty guineas.’

‘And I don’t think he would have afterwards parted with him, major, for a thousand pounds,’ observed the other.

‘Dear me!’ said I. But I could not help thinking that he must have parted with him for a good deal less to my Brother Dick; unless Dick stole him. This last idea so agitated me, that I did not catch quite clearly what was said for a minute or two.

‘The gentlemen want to know how it is that the parrot has forgotten the articles of war,’ exclaimed my wife, touching my elbow; then added, in a terrified whisper: ‘For Heaven’s sake, get them out of the house, George; they are both stark staring mad.’

'The articles of war!' said I; 'I never knew he had learned them. Dick, Dick, why did you never repeat the articles of war?'

'Pooh, pooh! Kill the captain!—scuttle the ship!' chuckled the parrot.

'Now, *that's* very extraordinary too,' remarked the military stranger. 'Where *could* he have picked up all that sea-slang? Sir Fiddle was so very particular. He kept him in his own cabin all the way home; and nobody under gun-room rank was allowed to associate with him.'

'Some young scamp of a midshipman must doubtless have done it on the sly,' returned the other. 'But may I ask, Mr. Wilson, why you call him Dick?'

'Because that's his name,' observed I simply. 'I have no other reason whatever.'

'But it's *not* his name,' remarked the white-cravated gentleman confidently. 'His name is Tommy, and has been such for these forty years; he is denominated Tommy in the codicil. I am sure Fiddle would have been very unhappy at the notion of his being called Dick. You must not encourage the bird in such senseless extravagances. The wishes of the departed should be consulted as though he were actually alive. We have nothing, however, to complain of in your custody of the bird, Mr. Wilson; quite the reverse. Indeed, poor Mrs. Hubble informed us that she knew of nobody to whom we could intrust the faithful creature with greater confidence; when we have called upon her by accident, and not at the specified time, we understood that you had poor Tommy in keeping for the benefit of his health; and certainly you always sent him back to Pitt Street in high feather. Now that Mrs. Hubble is dead—(Did you not hear of it? Yes, the sad event took place more than ten days ago)—we do not know anybody fitter than yourself to whom to transfer this sacred charge. We came here to-day merely to identify the bird. In future, we shall visit you every 12th of August—it was the general's whitest day in the year, major, and aptly chosen; even paradise can be hardly a more charming spot to him than was his Perthshire moor. We wish you a very good

morning, Mr. Wilson. Permit me to congratulate you upon this first instalment of what I trust may be a long annuity to you and yours.' He pressed an envelope into my hand, and then he and his starched companion took their deliberate departure. I watched them walking slowly up the street. They were evidently not in the least apprehensive of being followed and seized as madmen. One presently called a cab, and bade good-bye to the other in a studiously courteous manner, just as though they had been about some business, which brought them together periodically, and made them acquaintances, without their ever becoming intimate friends. In the meantime, my wife was within a sob or two of hysterics, while I remained standing with the envelope in my hand, and a crossed cheque inside of it for a hundred guineas, payable to myself or bearer!

Nothing out of the *Arabian Nights*, where purses of sequins are flung about with such reckless prodigality, was surely to be compared to this adventure.

'What's o'clock?' cried the parrot, astonished at the stupified silence into which his master had been plunged.

'Excellent bird,' returned I, 'your words are the words of wisdom. It is half-past two, and the Messrs. Child close at three o'clock; there is not a moment to lose.' I arrived at the banking-house in time to present the cheque; and it was cashed without the least hesitation. I took my way back with more money in my pocket than I had ever possessed there in my life. My possession of it was a little mysterious, certainly; but then, had not my father foretold that Dick's legacy would prove a blessing to us, and bade me mark his words. I was inclined to accept everything in the past and in the future with a grateful heart, that was not disposed for question or analysis. It was a saying of my revered parent, when our cousin, the brewer's clerk, used to send us a kilderkin of rather inferior ale at Christmas-time, that you should never look a gift-cask in the bung-hole. If I had found a queen's messenger waiting for me at home with a patent of nobility made out in the name of Wilson, by reason of my proprietorship in that incomparable black parrot, I think I should have

taken it as a matter of course. I did not, however, find a queen's messenger, but, on the contrary, a porter from Furnival's Inn, who had brought a letter with him, and declined to leave the house without seeing me ; the contents were as follow :—

‘DEAR SIR—I wholly forgot, when Major Mordax and myself called upon you this afternoon with the first instalment of your annuity, to ask for your signature to the enclosed receipt ; which please to sign, and return by bearer.

‘Yours truly,

‘NATHANIEL POUNCET.

The receipt was in the same envelope.

‘Received of Matthew Mordax, Esq., and Nathaniel Pouncet, Solicitor, executors of the late General Sir Fiddle Faddle, the sum of one hundred guineas, being the annual stipend left by the will of the said general for the maintenance of his black parrot Tommy.’

These dreadful words revealed at once the dark source of our prosperity, as the policeman's lantern flashes on the implements of the burglar. I accompanied the messenger at once to Furnival's Inn with the depressing consciousness that I had got to refund my little property. It seemed to be very hard and grievous that my vested rights, for such they already seemed, should be thus infringed. I at once, however, set forth every circumstance connected with the affair before Mr. Nathaniel Pouncet, and had the satisfaction of perceiving that I was at least believed. ‘You are not to blame in this affair at all, Mr. Wilson,’ said he ; ‘far from it. But for your honesty, it is likely enough we should have paid you a hundred guineas a year for life. The late Mrs. Hubble must have cheated us out of that amount for fifteen years—ever since she hired your parrot to represent the deceased favourite of the poor general. It was a housekeeper, too, I think, who kept a bishop alive, to all appearance, for six months after death, and drove something like him every day

through his own cathedral town, in order that she might receive the half-yearly revenue of his see. I really don't know which was the worse case; except that in the bishop's '—here the lawyer smiled—'there seems to have been no necessity for a substitute, and therefore the fraud was rather more negative or passive. You will not, of course, have to repay those sums, Mr. Wilson, which this woman remitted to you upon false pretences, but which you did not, I am sure, suspect to be false. Of course, I must receive the one hundred guineas; but we will communicate upon that subject with the general's heir-at-law, who will be glad to learn that this troublesome charge upon the estate no longer exists, and who has a heart to sympathise with your disappointment, as well as to appreciate your manly conduct.'

Finally, although my recompense for keeping my own parrot could not be entitled a Long Annuity, I received that refunded cheque for a hundred guineas 'in token of the esteem entertained by Francis Faddle, Esq.,' for my upright behaviour; or, in other words, because I had not been so fraudulent as Mrs. Hubble. No wonder that she had been so anxious for our parrot's company between the 6th and 13th of August! No wonder that she had thought Tommy a more becoming name for him than Dick! What pleased my wife most of all in the whole transaction was, that she had so sturdily refused to part with the dear bird for good and all. 'What a rich reward has been given us for obeying the dictates of affection! What ever *would* you have said, George, had I sold our Dick for fifteen guineas at once, instead of receiving more than two hundred and sixty for, as it were, the interest of our principal?'

'Well, Lucy, I should have said that you had imitated that unsagacious housewife who killed her parrot for the sake of its golden eggs.'

'That was a goose, George,' remarked my wife a little stiffly.

'Fiddle, Faddle, what's the odds?' screamed Dick.



THE SAVANT TRIUMPHANT.

AS a humble member of the *Float and Trimmer Club*, Twickenham-on-Thames, I wish to add my mite of evidence to the irrefutability of science, as exemplified in the person of its well-known disciple, Professor Vertebrey. I am anxious to do this, not only in justice to the professor, but also in expiation of much discredit of his theories entertained by me until quite lately, but whereof I am now become a trusting recipient. For, belonging to the same angling association with Vertebrey for many years, familiarity perhaps bred in me some contempt; and the more so, since, although I am myself far from a fortunate fisherman, he has never, within my experience, caught anything above half-a-pound weight, and even that in by no means a skilful manner. True, when a fish is once out of water, the professor knows the number of its bones, and where each ought to lie, within a hairbreadth; but in his method of securing it in its native element, he is more peculiar than successful. Sometimes he jerks his line so vehemently that the fish escapes with some fathoms of expensive line, and even occasionally with the top joint of the rod: and sometimes he whirls his finny prey above our heads, and lashes us with it unpleasantly, before it can be secured by the boatman appointed for that special purpose. In this under-estimation of the professor, I had an ally in Mr. Gideon Grubb,

a brother-member of our association, and one of our most killing rods. When this gentleman hears of a fish having been seen in this or that locality, from the Tweed to the Thames, he packs up his piscatorial weapons, and, just like a knight-errant of old, upon the news of a dragon or a giant, sallies forth, and slays the creature to a certainty. A score of other fishermen may be bent on the same achievement, but Mr. Grubb is invariably the captor, if he only arrives at the scene of action in time. I think he must have some secret like that of Mr. Rarey for the enticement and destruction of fish; for although I may have been angling for hours without a bite, this man has only to throw a fly upon the very water which I have whipped in vain, and straightway he pulls some monster of the deep from its bosom, and asks contemptuously what sort of bait I have been fishing with.

As Mr. Grubb has no means of estimating the eminence of his fellow-creatures except with reference to their capabilities of killing fish, it is easy to imagine that he does not think much of Vertebrey, notwithstanding that his reputation is European; nor, indeed, do I believe that he had any very high opinion of me until a certain Saturday of July last, when I happened to catch the heaviest fish of the day. I had never attained the proud distinction before, although I had striven for it for years, and of course I was proportionably elevated. The notion that I should be president of the club for that evening at our social repast—a dignity which my success conferred—filled me with a majestic serenity. I surveyed the creature which had procured me so honourable a post—although it was only a barbel—as though it had been a sturgeon-royal. I did not like other people—and especially Grubb—taking it up and weighing it in a depreciatory manner, as if the ordinary scales were not to be trusted; I did not like the professor regarding it through his spectacles as though he could look into its inside. Conceive, then, my mortification when five out of our little company of nine began to make excuses for non-attendance at dinner, on account of various engagements in town; for my part, I set it all down to simple jealousy

at my having at last attained a like distinction with themselves, for they had all been presidents at one time or another, except myself and the professor. I openly ascribed their behaviour to that low motive ; and when the remaining three observed that it was scarcely worth while to dine at the inn, as usual, with such diminished numbers, and that it would be better to go home, I observed, with ferocity, that the proposition was very agreeable to me, and that I did not care if I never dined with the *Float and Trimmer Club* again.

However, although greatly hurt and disappointed, I did not quite mean that ; and when they all allowed that 'it was very hard upon me,' and that 'I bore it like a trump' (which I didn't), my feelings were a little mollified. Grubb took advantage of this fact to beg for the barbel, since he had a few friends to dine with him that evening, to whom the fish would be, if not a delicacy, at least a novelty, and 'as it was such a very heavy one for the size.' I thought this harder than all, for I should have liked to have had that barbel stuffed and hung up in a glass-case, with a suitable inscription under it, in my drawing-room ; but I could not very well refuse so great a man, whose request, moreover, was itself a sort of compliment. I did not think, at the time, of the possible consequences that might flow from that generous act.

At the next weekly meeting of our club, at which, by-the-bye, I by no means caught the heaviest fish, a discussion arose with relation to that same gift-barbel, between Mr. Gideon Grubb and Professor Vertebrey, which threatened to terminate in blows. We were at dinner, and it began in this manner :

'I should not have thought that a barbel could ever have swallowed a jack,' observed Mr. Grubb, addressing the company in general.

'If you think so now,' returned the professor quietly, 'you had better return to your original belief. It can swallow nothing of the kind.'

'I do not *think*, but I am perfectly certain that it can,' answered Mr. Grubb angrily. 'You theorists are always

positive enough, but it is practical men who, after all, decide these matters, by the results of their own experience.'

'They are useful enough as handmaids to science,' returned Vertebrey calmly: 'but they have very crude notions of evidence.'

If Mr. Gideon Grubb was a handmaid, he was certainly not a prepossessing one, as he replied: 'It is a pity that science cannot teach people good-manners. I have only to say, Mr. Professor, that the barbel which Mr. Jones was so kind as to give me last Saturday, and for which I beg again to thank him,* had actually swallowed a young pike, for I saw it taken out of its stomach with my own eyes.'

'I can't swallow *that*,' answered the professor with determination. 'But, pray, don't be angry, Sir; I should not believe it even if I saw it myself.'

'Well, upon my word,' said Mr. Gideon Grubb, 'you learned gentlemen are at least honest in your stupid scepticism. You first make up your mind how things ought to be, and then remain blind and deaf for the rest of your lives.'

'Thank you very much,' returned the professor. 'I have rarely seen ignorance walking alone, but almost always hand-in-hand with insolence.'

Then up I rose, and with some hesitation, but not, I trust, altogether without dignity, delivered myself of the following observations:

'Mr. President, and gentlemen of the *Float and Trimmer Club*, I feel it incumbent upon me, however disagreeable to myself, to make an explanation concerning that piscatorial phenomenon—the swallowing of the pike by the barbel—which has bred this strife between two such distinguished members of our association as Mr. Grubb and the professor. They are both right, and yet both wrong, as in the case of the chameleon, with which—although that creature is not, strictly speaking, a fresh-

* It is Mr. Grubb's custom, when wrangling with anybody, and I dare say the reader has observed it in other quarrelsome men, to be extraordinarily civil to any third person who happens to be present.

water fish—we are most of us doubtless acquainted. The pike *was* found within the stomach of the barbel, and yet the barbel did not swallow the pike. Mr. Grubb's evidence is perfectly accurate, although not his deduction; and I cannot withhold my approbation from the determined manner in which the professor stuck to his conviction in spite of such irrefragable testimony. The fact is, gentlemen, that having been unsuccessful in catching the heaviest fish at our club meetings for a hundred-and-twenty weeks (exclusive of "fenced" months), I devised a laborious scheme for compelling Fortune to favour me. I know not what could have induced me to behave so unlike a scholar, a divine—for I am, as you know, a clergyman—and a member of the *Float and Trimmer Club*; but I rather imagine that it was the success of a similar unworthy stratagem which I once put into practice in my youth, and which, now that I am on my knees (figuratively speaking), I may as well confess also. At a certain reservoir-party, I once won a shilling sweepstakes (to be given to him who caught most fish) by dexterously putting back *the same dace* into the water—catching him over again no less than thirty-five times—making, in short, three dozen dace of that single capture. The remembrance of that master-stroke of knavery must, I think, have set me on to the scarcely less defensible stratagem of last week. Mr. President and gentlemen, having caught my small pike and my large barbel, I thought I would combine their advantages by stuffing the former down the throat of the latter, and thereby increasing its weight. I assure you, gentlemen, that it was not an easy task. With your knowledge of the formation of a barbel's throat, Mr. Professor, you may easily imagine what obstacles my endeavours met with, seconded, as they were, by such an inefficient ally as the second joint of my fishing-rod. I trembled when I saw your intelligent eye fixed upon that distended fish. I thought the very balance would have refused its office, and declined to chronicle so fraudulent a transaction. Although pronounced your chief, I was not a happy man. I shrunk at first from recording in

our records the fact of my having obtained the presidency by such illegitimate means : you may observe, although I did record it, that the handwriting is excessively shaky——'

I was not allowed to proceed further. Before tears choked my utterance, the club interfered, with a unanimous expression of forgiveness. Mr. Grubb declared that the temptation might fairly be said to be too great to be resisted by our mortal nature ; while the professor protested that the triumph which science had thus obtained at my unwilling hands might easily atone for the slight peccadillo of putting a pike inside a barbel.





‘THE TWA DOGS.’

NEW VERSION.



PASS my life wholly in the country, with the exception of one week at Christmas-time, when my late husband's sister is so good as to receive me in Connaught Square. During these seven days, I seem to be in quite another state of existence, and everything strikes me as strange and novel that I see and hear. My hostess is a lady of fashion, and carries me about with her from scene to scene of gaiety, until I wake up one fine morning—for the mornings are seldom fine in London—and find myself once more in my quiet humble home in Sleepiton, like Cinderella after the ball. Nothing, however, impresses me more with the sense of contrast between town and country than the difference of treatment which that domestic pet, a house-dog, experiences in the two places. I have a little dog at home, who is as dear to me as any four-footed creature can be, and it is, I confess, with a pang of regret that I leave ‘Trim’ behind me when I start for the metropolis; but I no more fear for Trim's safety, when I am away, than I am apprehensive that my ancient cook, Rachel Harris, will be snatched away by an eagle, through having found too much favour in the eyes of mighty Jove. Now, in London, nobody can keep a pet—unless it's a poll-parrot in one's bed-room—with any certainty of retaining possession of it for twelve

consecutive hours. It need be neither beautiful nor rare, to excite cupidity ; but only let it be known that it is a pet, and you become liable to have it stolen from under your very eyes, for the sake of the subsequent 'salvage'—the reward. That is one reason, among a thousand others, why Trim and I will never become Cockneys. My sister-in-law, Miss Adela Brabazon, has a crumpled rose-leaf of this sort in her otherwise pleasant life-pillow—a pet-dog of which she is liable to be robbed. 'Liable,' do I say? Yes, 'liable,' if a gentleman in difficulties with bailiffs inside his door, and a couple more watching the back and front of his house, may be said to be liable to arrest. If she had a couple of winged dragons to guard Mimmie day and night, she could not be positively sure of him, for all the dog-stealers in London are banded together against the liberties of that French poodle ; they are not, of course, thirsting for his life, but they have set their hearts upon pocketing his ransom. Yet every Christmas that has found me in Connaught Square has found Mimmie there also, and it did so this last December that ever was. Incessant vigilance ; a blue ribbon round his neck, one end of which was always in the hand of his mistress when he went abroad ; a silver bell, whose tinkling, did it intermit for half a second, was missed by her watchful ears ; a couch at her bed-foot ; a cushion at her right hand during meal-times—these were a few of the precautions, thanks to which Adela had managed to retain possession of her treasure for years, each of which seemed more to endear to her the shivering object of her affections. I use that adjective because Mimmie always did shiver very uncomfortably, or, at all events, always at Christmas-time, in spite of a little scarlet jacket, which reminded one somehow of Red Riding-hood, her grandmother, and the wolf, at the same moment. For Mimmie's face was, for its size, exceedingly truculent, although his body only awoke sympathy in the good, and ridicule in the inhuman ; for the fact is, he was one of those half-shaven poodles, one end of which resembles in miniature the King of Beasts, and the other a shorn

sheep: like the month of March, he came in, said Adela's nephew, like a lion, and went out like a lamb; an observation which she never forgave that wicked wag, and will remember, I am afraid, to her last gasp, by forgetting him in her will.

However, 'to resume,' as those dear old twaddlers of the Minerva Press (from whom I have caught the trick of digression) used to say. When I arrived in Connaught Square last Christmas-eve, Mimmie was on the drawing-room sofa, couched on seal-skin, but nevertheless shivering as usual, until his silver bell rang quite a peal.

'Dearest Adela,' cried I, embracing my hostess, 'you look very pale! Nothing is wrong with our precious little favourite here, I hope?' For nothing was ever wrong with Adela herself, I knew: she has a constitution that three dinner-parties a week, with the opera on alternate nights for a dozen seasons, has failed to shatter or even weaken in the smallest degree: however, it must be added, she does not get up so early in the morning as we do at Sleepiton.

'Nothing is now the matter, Cordy' (my name is Cordelia); 'but I am suffering from the effects of a catastrophe—nay, a course of catastrophes—such as perhaps has never before tried human heartstrings so severely in this world.'

'Ah, then, something *has* happened to Mimmie!' exclaimed I.

'Of course,' returned my sister-in-law. 'What other trouble could have so moved me? Look at these weary eyes, this wasted form! Anxiety, sorrow, despair, have each in turn consumed me; last of all came reaction'—she pointed towards the dog, as though he answered to that name instead of Mimmie—'and then I broke down altogether. The recovery of half-drowned persons, you know, Cordy, is said to be the most painful part of drowning, and so it has been with me.'

'Mimmie has not been half-drowned, has he?' said I, not exactly understanding the drift of my sister-in-law's statement.

'No, no ; much worse than that. But it is no use your guessing. The imagination of the most morbid can never picture the reality of what has occurred to that precious dog. What you witness is a resuscitation from the tomb.'

I stared at Mimmie with all my might, throwing into, at the same time, my expression all the sympathy of which it was capable ; but I was aware that the performance was a failure. I had such very little data, you see, to go upon ; and the creature looked so wonderfully comfortable except for his shivers.

'Dead and alive !' exclaimed my sister-in-law in lugubrious tones—'dead and alive, and lost and found !'

'What ! has our dear Mimmie been lost at last ?' cried I, catching at this sprig of reason in Adela's wild talk.

'Yes, Cordy—lost indeed ; not for an hour, as upon that occasion when we found him curled up in my knitted *chaud soulier* ; or in that worse affair, when he got shut up in the cellaret, like the poor lady in the Mistletoe Bough—but for whole days and nights—sleepless nights, you may be sure, to *me* ; and when found—think of *this*, Cordy—only returned to me a corpse !'

I had heard that ladies of fashion in London are sometimes addicted to drink, and I began to think that dearest Adela had given way to this custom since last year, and was not quite herself ; but I said nothing, only sat down near the handle of the bell.

'I never wrote to you about it, Cordy, for I had not the heart to write ; but now that I have my darling back again—he only arrived last night—it will be quite a comfort to me to tell you his sad story. Let me see—I think it was in October that you heard from me concerning Jemima's leaving us : she was a good cook, and understood Mimmie's constitution thoroughly, so that I was really sorry to part with her. Moreover, I think I may say that she had a kind mistress, and when I was not myself at hand, that Mimmie evinced his gratitude and affection towards her in a thousand ways. However, she gave up all that "to better herself," forsooth, as the poor misguided creature chose to call getting married, and left

us for an Irishman with red whiskers and a cast in his eye. The woman that I engaged in her place was not nearly so good a cook, but she had excellent testimonials from her last two places; and it was especially stated of her, that she could be trusted with untold gold. She therefore took *Jemima's* place as custodian, in my absence, of our precious *Mimmie*.

'Not three days had elapsed, however, after she set foot in this doomed house, when that lovely dog suddenly disappeared. O the void, the void, the void, *Cordy* dear, and the aching of this wretched heart! Never to hear his whine when he wanted to be let out!—never to hear his scratching at the door when he wanted to be let in!—never to hear his little feet go pit-a-pat upon the dining-room table on their way to the fig-box at dessert! *Tennyson* says that "it is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all." I am not sure about that; but, at all events, the best thing that one can possibly do under those circumstances is to offer a reward; and I did so. Everybody knew how broken-hearted I was, and how money in such a case would be no object. All the servants were well aware that I would give almost anything even for *Mimmie's* poor dead body, rather than be tortured with the idea that he was perhaps being ill-treated—fed on liver, bullocks' heart, chitterlings. Goodness knew what his delicate appetite might not be starved into eating! On the fifth day of my darling's disappearance, a person entered, and sent up a request to see me in private upon particular business. He was in decent mourning—which he had put on, doubtless, out of respect to my feelings—some people might have taken him for an unbeneficed clergyman; but I knew that he was a dog-stealer at the very first glance, and I would rather have seen him in my drawing-room just then, than the two archbishops, for I knew that he brought me tidings of my missing favourite.

"You know something about my dog?" said I at once.

"Yes, Ma'am, I do. If you will be kind enough to

sign this paper, which it binds you not to prosecute me in the matter, whatever happens, I'll tell you what I know."

"I would have signed anything, short of a blank cheque, to hear what this man had got to say: his wicked eyes had but lately looked upon my Mimmie; his uncleanly hands, perhaps, had fed him; his cruel voice had chided him, very likely, for sobbing his little heart out in grief at being taken from his home. Still, though he was not the rose (nor anything like it, particularly in the way of odour), he had been near the rose, and that gave him an interest in my eyes. I signed the document with eager fingers. "Go on," I cried; "do not rack me with suspense. Say my Mimmie is happy."

"“Well, Ma’am,” returned this person, twisting his fur-cap round and round in an embarrassed manner, “he aint *unhappy*, that’s certain. The fact is, Ma’am—— Now, don’t ye ‘take on’ at what I’m going to tell you; we must all come to it some day, you know——”

““Is he dead, man?” interrupted I in an awful voice.

““Yes, Ma’am, that’s truth; dead as a door-nail is your little doag. He was tuk with summut or other only last night—I think it was the cattle plague—and all the man could do as found him (and werry great care on him he took) was without avail. Your little doag is dead; but very nice he would make up to stuff and put in a glass case, or make a footstool of for the winter months——”

““Silence, wretch!” exclaimed I. “Dare not to mock my grief with such abominable suggestions. Bring my poor Mimmie’s body home, that I may pay it the last sad offices; and never let me see your evil face again.”

““Certainly, Ma’am,” returned he, but without stirring a step. “The price of that precious carkiss is ‘Ten Pounds.’”

““Ten pounds!” cried I, “for a dead dog!”

““And dirt cheap, too, Ma’am,” replied this shameless individual. “Why, the surgeons used to give us as much for a mere human stranger. Think of the melan

choly pleasure as will be given to your feelin' heart in seein' the last of him, and puttin' him, maybe, in one of them big flower-pots, so that Forget-me-nots, and Heart-seases, and Daffydownillies——"

"Hold your wicked tongue, bad man," cried I. "Here is five pounds on account. I don't want to hear one syllable of how you stole my dog, or how you murdered him, though I believe that you did both; but only bring his dear remains to me, and you shall have the rest of the money. Go, go."—You may suppose what a good cry I had, Cordy, when that vile wretch closed the door behind him, and I was left alone with my regrets.

'The next morning, this monster left our dead favourite at the door, wrapped up in white-brown paper. I would not see him, but sent the money down by my maid, who was also to identify the body; for I knew that there was no limit to the treacheries of his abandoned class. But there was no doubt about the matter whatever. There was Mimmie, stark and stiff, his lion-mane quite out of curl; that lovely tail tucked under him (to economise space), which was never to wag again at the voice of his mistress. We brought him into the boudoir, and laid him out, poor dear, upon the loo-table.'

'At all events, Adela,' said I, perceiving that she was too overcome to continue the subject, 'you had nothing to reproach yourself with upon his account.'

'Not much, Cordy—not much: but there was one thing that went through me like a knife. I had been very cruel to him the very day before he was taken from us; he would not "beg," as usual, for his breakfast, and I gave him his bread and milk without any sugar in it—and he was *so* fond of sugar.'

'You will make yourself ill, if you go on like that, Adela,' said I.

'I *have* made myself ill, Cordy. The doctor is coming to see me this very afternoon. But it does me good to cry: and, besides, I have told you the worst now, and there is nothing but good news to speak of further. About a week after Mimmie was stuffed and put in a

glass-case at the foot of my bed—just where he used to sleep in his lifetime—the wicked wretch who had brought him to me called again. At first, I refused to let him come up stairs—for what had we now in common?—but he was so importunate over the area railings, that the cook implored me to see him, if it was but for a moment; so I did. I flattered myself that perhaps the wretch might have kept behind a lock of the poor dear's hair, which I should have been glad enough to purchase for a locket. However, he had come on quite another errand.

"I am afraid, Ma'am," said he gravely, "that you and I have both been and made a four paw."

"A what!" cried, I with indignation.

"A mistake about that there small quadruped as you lost. You have not got the right un back, after all. He's very like in other respects; but if you look inside his mouth, the colour of the roof is different. Perhaps, if you have got the little party in the house, you will just send for him."

'I rang the bell for the precious relic to be brought down, while my heart was torn by conflicting feelings; doubt of this villain and his amazing statement; chagrin at having shed so many tears over a possibly strange dog; hope—ecstatic hope—that my Mimmie might yet be restored to my longing arms alive! Certainly the roof of the stuffed beauty was not so pink as my own Mimmie's had been; but then, as I argued, it might have changed its peach-like hue in the—the process.

"Moreover," continued the dog-stealer, "there is one more row of curls shaved off, Ma'am."

'Upon this occasion, and for his own base purposes, the wretch really spoke the truth. Grief had doubtless prevented my making any strict *post-mortem* investigation; but now I perceived that I had indeed been tricked.

"I will buy no more bodies, man," cried I; "but if my Mimmie is still alive, I will forgive you even this."

"I rayther think he is, Ma'am; I've a notion I might get at the man who has got him in keeping. Only, of course, you must pay more for a live dog than a dead one. Say fifteen pound."

“I will give you five,” said I; “and you shall have the stuffed dog back again; the process was a very expensive one.”

‘At this the wretch actually burst out laughing.

‘In a word, Cordy, after haggling for many minutes, and signing another document, by which, as I have since heard, I made myself amenable to the law, by compounding a felony, I had to promise him the money. That very night, I received my Mimmie safe and sound. There was no occasion to count his curls, or look in his mouth, for the way in which he frolicked about me, and answered to his name, was the best proof my heart could give me that he was my dog indeed. The only thing changed about him was his appetite; and I am bound to say that that was much improved.’

‘But how did it all happen? and why did the man sell you the dead dog?’

‘Well, it was all done by the new cook, who gave warning the very day after Mimmie was restored to me. It turns out that she was the wife of the dog-stealer, and only engaged herself to me in order to put the dear creature into her husband’s wicked hands. He had already stolen another animal almost exactly similar, and the owner not offering a reward sufficiently high, he had come hither to know what he could get out of me for it—dead. He dared not sell it me alive, as of course I should in that case have at once detected the fraud. So I was indirectly the cause of the murder of poor Lady McGlowrie’s pet. I sent her the stuffed animal with my best compliments; but she was not at all grateful, and has never even offered to pay for the glass shade or the velvet cushion. Altogether, the affair has cost me a mint of money, as well as severely tried my constitution—— That’s the doctor’s ring, if I am not mistaken. There’s no occasion to leave the room, dear. He’s a very nice man; and I always employ him because he seems to be so fond of dogs. He generally brings his little terrier with him, because he knows it pleases me.’

While she was yet speaking, Dr. Carmairs was announced by the footman, and his four-footed companion

by a snappish snarl from Mimmie. It was a very vulgar dog, and I scarcely wondered that the aristocratic animal on the sealskin should have objected to his intrusion: the contrast between the poodle 'oiled and curled like an Assyrian bull, and the little terrier, black and iron-mould (rather than tan), with the barest apology for a tail that ever was seen, was very remarkable.

When the doctor had paid his respects to Adela, and been introduced to me, he proceeded to ask after 'the 32-pounder,' as he facetiously termed Mimmie, whose recovery (including advertising and the stuffed dog) had cost my sister-in-law a great deal more than the twenty-five sovereigns paid to her cook's husband.

'Mr. Cadger has not given him another invitation, I hope, since my last visit?'

'How can you trifle with my feelings, doctor?' returned Adela peevishly. 'You know that I never let him out of sight for a moment, now. There is not a dog in London so well looked after.'

'That's all very well, Madam: but you know as well as I do that a pet's never safe unless the same precautions are taken as I have adopted with little Billy. You had much better let me have your poodle for a course of——' Here Adela put her fingers into her ears, and screamed at her medical attendant in a manner highly becoming a patient, even though afflicted with nerves.

'If you won't listen,' said the doctor, turning good-humouredly to me, 'I shall try and secure the advocacy of your sister-in-law.—I want Miss Brabazon to let me insure her Mimmie against dog-stealers, as I have already insured my terrier, whose native ugliness has been no protection from their snares. You must know, Madam, that Billy is a dog of science, and has been a greater benefactor to the human species than any man since Jenner. I bought him when a puppy for a shilling, in the Tottenham Court Road, and have used him for the purposes of Toxicological experiment for many years. Billy's tissues have been impregnated with every description of deadly poison; into his veins have been injected the most fatal fluids, until his circulation can scarcely be

said to be that liquid, which a wag in my medical-student days used always to denominate Hervey's Sauce, because he said "blood" was not a pretty word. Billy is not a dog of fashionable exterior, but he has been bent with strychnine like a Bean, Madam. He used at last to howl in quite an afflicting manner whenever I whistled to him to come into my laboratory; but now he's no longer a subject—are you, Billy? He's more like a king; or, at all events, a gentleman at large. My little Susy, bless her! took such pity upon him, that she insisted upon his release from his scientific duties, and becoming her pet. From that moment, in spite of his very unprepossessing appearance and deteriorated constitution, his liberties became imperilled. Before a week of his new life had begun, Billy was stolen by this very Mr. Cadger, who has so imposed upon our friend here. Susy was inconsolable, and wanted me to offer a purse of sequins, or something of that sort—the dear child being devoted to the *Arabian Nights*—for his recovery. But I said: "No. Mr. Cadger will never be able to dispose of our ugly Billy, who is fortunately one of those articles of property which are described as 'of no value but to the owner.' Cadger will come to me of his own accord." And back he came, twisting his fur-cap, and spinning his very unlikely yarn about "a friend in the city," just as though I had wanted to borrow money of him. But all I said to Cadger was this: "It is true I have lost this dog, but he is of no use to me whatever. You would never have heard that I was enquiring for it, but that I thought it a duty to my fellow-creatures to warn them (if I could do so without expense) of what might be a great peril to themselves. I have used that dog for purposes of experiment, until it is so *impregnated with poison, that, if it should but lick a man's hand, his life would not be worth six hours' purchase.* If a drop of his blood should chance to be spilled, it would infect a house for ever. That's all."

'Mr. Cadger turned deadly pale; murmured something about going to tell his friend in the city; and little Billy found his way home, all by himself, that very evening.

Now, if Miss Brabazon would only be persuaded to lend me Mimmie for a course of scientific experiments, I will guarantee the safety of her pet—that is, from dog-stealers.'

But Adela would not hear of this arrangement; and Mimmie, the apple of her eye, is guarded as before, as though he were one of the golden apples of the Hesperides.





MISS MONTMORENCI.

THERE are marrying-families, just as there are 'marrying-men,' and also families who, it seems to have been settled from the first, shall never marry. Half-a-dozen daughters may be 'got off,' as the phrase goes, in the one case, and not above one of them, perhaps, make an absolutely bad match, such as a union with a subaltern; yet the girls may have neither money nor good looks. In the other case, on the contrary, there may be a little something in the funds belonging to each Miss Singleton, and one may have talents, and another fine ankles, and a third may sing like a nightingale; yet, to the great chagrin of the old birds, they will never leave the paternal nest, and, when those are dead, will still continue to live together there or elsewhere, in maiden meditation fancy free. It is the vulgar fashion to laugh at maiden ladies when, in the opinion of others—although, perhaps, not in their own—they have reached the period when the chance of getting a husband has become hopeless, and to conclude that all the romance of female life is concentrated in being wooed. Now, this is far from being the case. There is, in reality, infinite pathos even in those apparently uninteresting persons who lavish their love, for want of a better object, upon cats, or embrace—*faute de mieux*—Asceticism, and take up with Protestant nunneries. I do not speak of such spinsters—although they are by no means rare—as scatter their wealth of love over

friends and relatives, and go unaffectedly among the poor with kindly gifts and words; although I will just remark, that if the word 'angel' has an application to any description of female, it is surely to *them*, but confine my remarks solely to commonplace, unmarried females.

Do you suppose that if Miss Clarissa Singleton, for instance, has never had a definite offer of marriage, she has not been at least once upon the point of receiving one? Does she not remember the moment, although it was a quarter of a century ago, and more, when Charley Spinks, then just appointed to the Indian Civil Service, sat with her upon the purple cliff-top, looking out upon the limitless sea, and spoke of his impending exile, and that return to England which was never to be? She would have been an engaged young woman—that is her belief—had not the excursion-steamer from Ramsgate just then rounded the headland, and turned the conversation into another channel. Her enemies said, of course, that she had set her cap—although she did not wear caps then, alas! nor a front neither—at the young man from Haileybury (who, indeed, was her junior by a few years), and had done her very best to ensnare him, without effect; but that is not Clarissa's view, nor that of her Sister Mary. Polly (as she was always called), without entertaining the least impression that *she* has ever been the object of any man's affection, has a loving belief in the attractions of her younger sister, which is a romance in itself. She reverently keeps the day of young Spinks's decease by violence—he was swallowed by a royal Bengal tiger—as the date of Clarissa's widowhood. They talk of the mournful affair together with genuine sorrow, and mingle sympathetic tears. They do not know that Spinks had *delirium tremens* twice from indulgence in brandy pawnee before he met with his fatal adventure, or that he had been betrothed to Miss Fahrenheit of Calcutta, months before it occurred. Miss F., who belongs to a marrying-family, and went out to India, indeed, for that very purpose, has married two husbands since. 'Spinks—Spinks?' she has forgotten the very name which is held so sacred at Vestal Lodge by the two old maids with whom romance has

nothing to do. Yet although Miss Mary errs when she deems her dearest Clarissa still beautiful, is there not something touching and pathetic about that hallucination? She is very bitter against the young ladies of the neighbourhood—those ‘mere chits of girls’—who monopolise the male attention at picnics and evening-parties, to the detriment of her sister; she says uncharitable things about that little flirtation in the orangery at Lady Tiptop’s ball, of which she happened to be an unseen witness when everybody was thought to have been in the supper-room, only nobody had had the charity to take her down; her religious views are acid from being kept so long in a somewhat narrow vessel without any admixture of opinions male, except those of her favourite minister—but nevertheless Miss Mary Singleton is a good creature (as poor human creatures go), with scarcely a grain of selfishness in her disposition.

Miss Clarissa, too, is far from being that ridiculous individual which many of her younger neighbours would have us believe. Although her pet-dog Flora is fatter than is becoming, or even judicious for the dear animal’s own well-being, and its mistress still continues to stuff it with dainties unfit for the canine palate, such as macaroons, yet her conduct is neither so foolish nor so blamable as that of Mrs. Doting, who brings up her children so as to be hated by all men who set foot in her otherwise pleasant drawing-room, or as that of Lady Tiptop, who commits the custody of her offspring to hireling hands from the moment of their birth, and is not quite certain whether there are three children or four up in that third-floor nursery. It is true that poor Clarissa has no Mr. Doting to help her to kill her dog with kindness, and no Sir Harry Tiptop to neglect both her and it, but as husbands of others, they afford her a most interesting subject of conversation and comment. There is nobody in the county more full of information than Miss Clarissa and her sister. Their three maids have the most wonderful power of acquiring knowledge concerning other people’s affairs, and they are said to be sent forth from Vestal Lodge for that express purpose. The whole house-

hold may be considered to be a colony of the sub-genus *Eciton*, whereof the servants are the foraging ants, and their mistresses the soldiers ; and very ingenious insects too.

There is one form under which the Miss Singletons appear least of all attractive to their fellow-creatures—namely, when they keep a seminary for young ladies, which it is surely only natural that they, being in straitened circumstances, should do. For my own part, I think there is something sad, rather than ridiculous, about the phrase ‘decayed gentlewoman.’ I believe it to be only a curious coincidence—and not a fact the genuineness of which is to be questioned—that these are always the daughters either of ‘a general-officer,’ or of ‘an evangelical clergyman.’ You would not have them advertise themselves, hoping to be teachers of youth, as the offspring of an attorney, I suppose, or of a veterinary surgeon. At this point my mind reverts with a flash to Miss Montmorenci.

I had originally purposed to write an edifying essay upon old maids ; to produce such a monograph upon that subject as should rescue even the inferior orders of that species from the vulgar contumely which they have endured so long and so undeservedly. But I cannot divorce myself (speaking metaphorically, of course) from Miss Montmorenci, having once had that lady brought to my affectionate remembrance. I would willingly write her entire biography, if the facts lay within my reach, but they do not ; nobody knows, to begin with, when she was born ; she has no contemporaries, and I have not sufficient data to judge from her personal appearance. I never saw her without her raven hair, and her teeth that shame the elephant. Taking her as one finds her, without her veil, I should say she was sixty ; looking at her, as she moves away, or—less delicately—seen from behind, with her head up and her figure as straight as an arrow, I should put her down at six-and-twenty. Great, however, as is the interval between those epochs, I do not think her real age lies within their limits ; yet, do not imagine upon that account that she has ceased to con-

sider man as a dangerous animal. No, she is still modest and retiring in her manners, and would not enter an omnibus, where there is no separation between the sexes, upon any account whatever. She has three maiden sisters who assist her in the supervision of a suburban seminary for young ladies, and the whole four have long ago made up their minds to perish, single. Their establishment is justly celebrated for strictness and propriety. I remember, when a lad of fifteen, going to see my own sister there, and kissing a very pretty girl, with whom she had sworn an eternal friendship, upon the stairs. It was a circular staircase, and Miss Montmorenci was looking over the banisters on the top landing. I never shall forget her indignation, and the horror with which she threw up her hands with mittens on them. It was a wonder she did not brick up the offending pupil in company with a French roll and a glass of water; though, I am sure, I meant no harm, but only to convince the young lady that the affection which my relative entertained for her was approved of by myself.

And yet it was destined that the nerves of Miss Montmorenci should receive even a still greater shock than the above, and more than one of them; her earthly career is not yet closed, but it is not possible that there can be anything in store for her so dreadful as the two misfortunes which I have in my mind. One of them occurred at the period of the Great Exhibition in Kensington. Miss Montmorenci had obtained leave from the various parents of her little 'charges'—as she sometimes called them, in contrast, I suppose, to her other sort of 'charges,' which my father used to say were anything but little—to take them to the world's fair; they were to come up by instalments of twelve, so that when they left the train, there might be four cabs engaged with a Miss Montmorenci in each of them. There had been a question as to whether private flies should not be engaged, but it had been finally determined—unfortunately, as it turned out—to risk the moral contagion of a hack carriage. It was the only time in her existence, as she subsequently observed, that Miss Montmorenci had ever

failed in the article of gentility; and she suffered for it bitterly. When she had brought her train of young ladies to the turnstile—and you may be sure it was a half-crown day—one of the door-keepers observed: ‘This a school, Ma’am, is it not?’

‘It is a seminary of young ladies,’ responded Miss Montmorenci haughtily.

‘Then please to give your name and address, Ma’am, that it may be reported in the *Times*. It is especially requested that all schools and colleges, sent here by public subscription, or whose expenses have been defrayed by private charity——’

Miss Montmorenci was spared the conclusion of this heartless speech; nature mercifully interfered in the guise of a fainting fit, and cherry-brandy had to be administered to her at the nearest refreshment-stall. She was restored—I can scarcely say ‘happily’—to consciousness, but never recovered the shock of having had her fashionable establishment confounded with a charity school! She had worn her own hair up to that period, but it turned black almost immediately afterwards, doubtless from anguish of mind.

Yet, as I have hinted, there was still a bitterness left in her cup of life, although she might so reasonably have concluded that she had drained it to the very dregs. During the Christmas holidays she came up to town, and endeavoured to seek forgetfulness in harmless dissipation. She went to the Pantheon, and to the British Museum, and to the Zoological Gardens. At night she frequented oratorios, and readings from Shakspeare at five shillings a stall, which it seems to me are a little dear, but then they are so fashionable. On Sundays, she promised herself especial pleasure—for Miss Montmorenci loves clergymen of almost all denominations, and might be backed (were such a proceeding decorous) to sit under the very dreariest divine with greater patience, if not edification, than any other individual of her weight and age. From St. Paul’s Cathedral to the Foundling Hospital, from Well Street Chapel to Mr. Spurgeon’s Tabernacle, she would doubtless have demurely flitted, like a

drab butterfly over clover, had not a circumstance occurred which sent her home on the next lawful day, and almost caused her to determine never to enter a metropolitan place of worship again. One Sunday afternoon she entered a certain West-end church, after service had already begun, having been misinformed as to its time of commencement. No verger being visible, and being very nervous, Miss Montmorenci laid her hand upon the door of a pew wherein sat a number of persons of her own sex, but which still had plenty of room in it, and quietly took her seat. The others stared at her a good deal, but she well knew how the best Christians will stare at a fellow-creature who trespasses upon their vested rights in the matter of a hassock, and was therefore not troubled by that circumstance. Others of the congregation stared too, and the verger—who ought to have known better—opened his eyes very wide indeed, when he saw where Miss Montmorenci had seated herself.

‘I dare say,’ thought she at first, ‘I have intruded among some family of consequence;’ but presently she noticed that several of her fellow-worshippers were dressed quite humbly, appearing as the wives of artisans. This puzzled her very much. At one part of the service, where Miss Montmorenci had been always accustomed to stand up, all the occupants of her pew fell on their knees, and not liking to appear singular, she did the same. The rest of the congregation, however, kept their feet. A vague feeling of discomfort, and of being somehow in a false position, made it quite impossible for Miss Montmorenci to attend to the sermon, and for the first time in her life she was glad to hurry out of church. The verger shot at her a glance of impudent drollery, which confirmed her in her resolution to go directly to the lady who had recommended her to that place of worship, and demand an explanation of what had occurred.

‘I never, my dear, met with such a rude congregation or so insolent a pew-opener,’ cried she. ‘What is there odd in *my* appearance, I should like to know, to provoke such levity? If there *is* anything, pray do not hesitate to tell me.’

‘Well, my dear Miss Montmorenci, you got into a peculiar pew. You observed they were all females, did you not; and none of them very far advanced in years? Well, that is the pew set apart for——. Now, my dear Miss Montmorenci, be calm; I see you have guessed all.’

Once again Nature mercifully interfered upon Miss M.’s behalf, and this time in the guise of hysterics; she had several fits of them, and passed the intervals of consciousness in bewailing the disgrace that had befallen her. I trust the news may never reach the seminary over which she presides, but—poor Miss Montmorenci had been churched!





THE HORRORS OF A HOLIDAY.



THINK it is the prospectus of Mr. Wackford Squeers that dilates so eloquently upon the disadvantage of that thing called a vacation, which at seminaries less well principled than Dotheboys Hall, is wont to interrupt the studies of youth at Christmas and midsummer ; but with this exception, I have observed that there is a popular prejudice in favour of holidays, not only among school-boys, in whom the mental powers have not come to maturity, but even with grown people, whom I should have thought experience might have made wiser in this matter.

Our senators are always taking holidays, from which I gather that they like him ; adjourning the House on account of the Derby Day—one of the most melancholy festivals, to my mind, in all the calendar ; for if you use the rail to Epsom, you are robbed and maimed, and if you use the road, you are upon it seven mortal hours ; proroguing their day of assembly because of the hunting ; and dissolving themselves in order to be on the moors. But this I will say for those of them who are statesmen, that they perceive the fallacy under which the rest are labouring—for nothing is more laborious than this holiday-making—and go about their work just as usual, only on platforms instead of at St. Stephen's. The bishops, too, do not often give way to this weakness : but perhaps their work is not so utterly exhausting as some would

have us believe, or rather, let us say, doubtless to these good men every day is more or less of a holiday. As for the lawyers, their Long Vacation is a disgrace to their intelligence; and the way in which they take advantage of it to the uttermost, a positive humiliation to human nature. I cannot conceive how they manage to spend those weary months of autumn without cross-examining anybody but *valets de place*, or putting in evidence anything beyond the notches in their alpenstocks. For my part, did I belong to that profession, I could not do it, but should insist upon one law-court at least being kept open during September for legal practice, even if there was no good judge to be got to listen to me, and I had to address the mace as 'My Lord.'

Let it not be imagined, from these remarks, that the present writer does not know what work is, and on that account stands in no need of relaxation. There are very few people in London — except the regular men of pleasure about town—who work as hard as I work. It makes me smile to hear my City friends talk of the toils of their calling. One day or other there will be a book brought out which shall expose the whole system of what is known by the generic term Business. If work were a thing to be produced like chicken, by *sitting*, then I grant you there are no such working-men as your City people. 'Our hours of business are from nine to five — unless anything particular should detain us beyond that hour.' The last part of the sentence is for the benefit of their wives, to account for the absence of their lords and masters from the domestic table, in case anything more attractive should present itself than coming home to dinner. From nine to five is supposed by the British public to be passed by these slaves of the desk in certain assiduous and exhaustive mental exercises; it is not calculation exactly, nor yet speculation, but something mysterious and intelligible, which partakes of the nature of both. This belief in the diligence and acumen of the mercantile community is a superstition which Englishmen cling to as to their book of books, the Peerage. The whole notion is baseless as a dream;

but that, as I have said, will be treated of in another place. What seems certain in the meantime is, that the work of the man of business is so wearing, as to require, at least once a year, country-air, sea-air, waters chalybeate or otherwise, and above all, a good long holiday.

Now, an occasional day of rest, nay, of amusement, is undoubtedly charming; and to the real toiler—such as the artisan—a boon which one would wish to see much oftener granted. But what do these business-men, these lawyers, these parliamentary people, do with whole weeks of idleness and leisure? Those persons who take to ascending mountains many thousand feet above the level of the sea, do but exchange one species of work for another, but the vast majority do nothing, and seem to like it. Poor Walter Scott incurred a great deal of pity and some contempt for insisting upon writing a little even during these unfrequent intervals when he ‘was refreshing the machine.’ But how could he help it?—how, as it seems to me, can any man help it? It is very far from my object to moralise upon the evils of idleness. Like a certain venerable divine of my acquaintance who inveighs against smoking, I hate it only because I can’t enjoy it. I have tried it, and it makes me sick. That advertisement of ‘eight hours at the sea-side’ seems to me to be pregnant with wisdom. Eight hours are about the limit of time which it seems to me possible for an intelligent being to pass with pleasure in sucking pebbles on the beach, in making ‘dick, duck, drakes’ in the water, in picking up seaweed and sea-anemones, and in exploring little circulating libraries in search of books which he could lay his hand on at once at Mudie’s, or even at any of those town libraries, which place the word ‘limited’ so appropriately in connection with their prospectuses.

When you have met Jones and his wife (whom you have left London expressly to avoid) on the Parade, and said you were glad to see them, what is to be done then, but wait anxiously for the arrival of the evening paper? It is certainly something that you now know how to value

those conveniences which before you began your holiday you accepted, without welcome, and as a matter of course. It is a curious but undoubted fact, that almost everything which gives you genuine content during this period of enjoyment arises from the little work that it is still necessary you should do; and that all which you look forward to with the greatest interest comes from the metropolis (whether it be London, Liverpool, or Edinburgh), from which you have just escaped with such mistaken hilarity. The very fish which is captured before your eyes is carried thither by railway for the gratification of your late fellow-prisoners, and only when they are glutted with the supply do you see a fin at your lodging-house table. What a squeezey miserable house it is compared with your own residence, where your cook is probably now giving her private parties in your reception-rooms (for her 'season' begins just when yours ends); you were not allowed to bring her with you, but must perforce accept the services of the landlady, who has been accustomed (she says) to send up dinners to the first families in the best style. If that is true, the first families are far from particular.

Your wife, who dare not remonstrate with *her* (such is her formidable appearance and mode of address), is not deterred from letting *you* know that you ought to be ashamed of yourself for being put out by trifles—such as underdone joints; and besides, you should not expect comforts such as you have at home, when at the sea-side and out for your holiday. Now that seems to me to be a very illogical statement, and one in which my reason utterly refuses to acquiesce. If a holiday means under-done meat, and fish that has made a double land-journey, let me go back to town. It is only the children who prevent my doing so; *they* certainly do enjoy themselves; and so should I, if I could take pleasure in digging with a wooden spade, or walling out the flowing tide with a sand-bastion, or in riding in a goat-carriage, or in eating periwinkles with a pin. But none of these occupations are suitable to a person of my years and habits. However, it is something to watch them, and to know

that they are supremely happy. The full horrors of a holiday are only experienced when one is condemned to take it *alone*.

This happened to me in February last (of all cheerful months for being idle in !), and I shall never forget it. After completing a certain immortal work of fiction, which shall be nameless (for the present), my medical attendant peremptorily interfered in my mode of life, and prescribed total idleness. I own I am a sad coward at taking medicine, and yet I had almost rather that he had written castor oil. No thoughts to be jotted down on paper ; no thoughts to be entertained at all ; no retiring into the study between breakfast and luncheon ; no correction of proofs ; no revision of manuscripts. The fiat had gone forth that I was to enjoy myself. From morn till eve was to be one white and dazzling blank. At first, I own, the thing had rather a pleasant look. To smoke my pipe without having to reflect upon the conduct to be pursued that morning by my hero, placed in embarrassing circumstances which required all his towering intellect, and all his nobility of spirit, and all his gigantic physical strength ; without having to consider how my heroine ought to behave in the most delicate of positions, which demanded all her acknowledged tact, and all her exquisite sensibility, and all that personal beauty which reminded us so of the sunny south ; without having to cudgel my brains for a fit punishment for that remorseless villain, who, having most satisfactorily disposed of certain troublesome though well-meaning characters by fire and sword, remained on hand himself, obstructing the smooth current of events. Not to have to think about all these people was, just at first, I allow, a relief and a comfort ; but by the time I had read the paper and arranged the books (which I was forbidden to peruse) in my little sanctum, and gone up to look at the children, who were almost frightened to see me at that unaccustomed hour, I began to feel a little weary.

‘Why not go out, my dear, and enjoy the sunshine?’ enquired my wife.

‘Ay, very true!’ said I. For since I never do go out until after luncheon, this idea never would have occurred to me of my own head. But like the making of a quarrel, it takes two people (at least) to enjoy the sunshine, and my wife, good creature (whose brain had *not* been pronounced in danger of softening) was far too busy to accompany me. Moreover, the February sun is not a very brilliant article, nor can it even be warranted to last; and when it went in, which it did in about three minutes, I did the same, with my teeth chattering. I took up the *Times* again mechanically, and reperused it with that loathing which is the peculiar effect of twice-read news. Then I went up again to the children, but was met at the door of their apartment by the nurse, with uplifted finger; ‘Hush, Sir; you mustn’t come in now. They’re both asleep.’ I had forgotten that it was their peculiar habit to go to bed again as soon as they had had their breakfast, but I most heartily began to wish that it was mine.

Fortunately, I remembered that I had a letter to write (it had been owing about seventeen months) to a dear friend in South Australia, and I sat down and wrote him a long one. What intelligence, what wit, what pathos, were spread over those three sheets of foreign post! I was quite astonished at myself as I read it over, and felt half inclined to address it to the printer instead of my correspondent. It was certainly the best letter I had ever written in my life, and no wonder! For I am accustomed to pay the epistolary claims of friendship and relationship only *after* those of literature have been satisfied; whereas, in this case, the very cream of my intellect had been given to this man in the bush. Here was, as it were, a fountain of precious wine set running for a limited period, and nothing to catch it in but the most ordinary wash-hand basin. And was it always to be so during this hateful holiday? Now I knew why Horace Walpole, and others with both wits and wealth, had written such good letters. It was not necessary that they should write books, and therefore they gave the best of what they had to say to their friends.

Why, surely, here was a subject in itself for a pleasing and thoughtful ess —— But what had the doctor said? ‘Total idleness, or I will not answer for your brain.’ Perhaps I had done wrong to write even that letter!

‘Why don’t you ask somebody to take a holiday *with* you?’ remarked my wife, when I had rather put her out by interfering with a number of her domestic arrangements, one after the other, and defended myself upon the ground that I had nothing else to do.

Excellent thought! I snatched up my hat, and made a round of unseasonable calls at once. It was astonishing how everybody was engaged. Like the boy in the fable who wanted the ox and the dog and a number of other useful animals to make a holiday with *him*, I found nobody would leave their business for my pleasure. They congratulated me, they expressed themselves as being exceedingly envious of my happy state, but they were not themselves threatened with softening of the brain, and must therefore pursue their daily toil. Why did I not go down to the sea-side, or into the country? Because, replied I grimly, my life is insured, and my family would forfeit all benefit upon that transaction in the event of my committing suicide. Could a man remain alone for four-and-twenty hours at South-end or Sandgate in the month of February, and not turn a yearning glance towards his razors? Would not the most philosophical subject of the Necessities of Being be induced by such a position to reflect seriously upon the Necessity of *not* Being?

I got my walks, as usual, in the afternoons, but they did not give me pleasure as before, for I was exhausted by my excursions of the morning. I returned home to dinner jaded and out of humour, and after dinner there was the loathsome *Times*, the very advertisements of which I knew by heart. In something like despair, I turned towards those of my acquaintance who were notorious as men of pleasure, and begged them to introduce me to the Halls of Revelry; though the peculiarity of their occupation is, that it does not begin until half-past

ten P.M., at which hour I am accustomed to retire to my virtuous couch. However, I was ordered to take a holiday, and so I took it; night after night I roamed—for the benefit of my health—from theatre to music hall, from music hall to supper-room, like some unhappy bee, who has been deceived by an artificial florist, and strives in vain to gather honey from ingenious combinations of paper and wax. Strange, indeed, are the delights of the dissipated! Wonderful is that enchanter Pleasure, who can persuade his votaries, night after night, that gas, and stifling heat, and evil smells form an atmosphere to be enjoyed, and stupid songs and witless jokes are matters to be applauded. Is it possible that the legs (and especially the knees) of the *habitués* of these sparkling scenes ache every morning as mine did under the same regimen? Do *their* heads throb—do *their* hands tremble? or is it that I am not cut out for a holiday-maker? At the expiration of ten days I met my doctor, and enquired in the mocking tones which I had learned of the stage-demons, whether he was satisfied with the ruin he had wrought? My hollow eyes, my sunken cheeks, my shambling gait, struck him with horror, notwithstanding the dreadful instances of disease with which his profession made him familiar.

‘Why my dear Sir,’ cried he, ‘you must have been disobeying my orders!—you must have begun another novel!’

‘No,’ answered I—‘not so: I have been following your instructions to the letter; I have been taking that holiday!—I have fallen a sacrifice to total idleness! Scientific fiend, behold your victim!’

He was shocked, as well he might be. ‘Go home,’ said he with gentleness—‘go home and keep quiet. I will send you a composing-draught, for you are excited, and will come and see you in the morning.’ He sent the draught, and I emptied it into the coal-scuttle. I tried some medicine of my own, which is kept in the ink-pot, and administered with a quill-pen. He expected to find me prostrate on the sofa, if not in bed; but like Dog Tray, when Mother Hubbard returned from

buying his coffin, he found me, if not laughing, in good spirits.

‘What are you doing?’ cried he—‘not at your desk again, I hope?’

‘Yes,’ said I, ‘and never mean to leave it. I am writing a paper from your own dictation, and I have called it the Horrors of a Holiday.’





BUYING LIFE.

I AM inclined to think that the divines are wrong in so universally ascribing to the prosperous a love of this life, and I doubt whether the notion of extinction does possess that terror for the human heart which is always ascribed to it by pulpit orators. It is the misfortune of the clergy, and yet one which we can scarcely wish remedied, that, regarding our fallen nature from a high orthodox standpoint themselves, they are often ignorant of how it looks from the position occupied by their less well principled fellow-creatures. 'Who is there without religion that does not contemplate death without a shudder?' is an expression very common in sermons. Even the atheist, we are told, recoils from the gloomy void of which it is *his* poor notion that death is the portal. Yet in China it costs less than fifty pounds to get a substitute to suffer capital punishment in your place, if the Son of the Moon and First Cousin to all the Planets has decreed your execution, and there are few more irreligious people under heaven than the Chinese. Moreover, these substitutes are often very respectable men, who wish to benefit their wife and children by the transaction; just as gentlemen here at home (less creditably) insure their lives in an indisputable office for the advantage of their families, and then put an end to their own existence.

It is true that some of these Celestial proxies are

regular scamps, and stipulate for the money down, and a week's grace in which to spend it in the most abandoned manner; but death is evidently no more feared in this case than in the other. In Japan, malefactors smoke upon the very scaffold, while their companions are having their heads cut off, and calmly remove their cheroots from their lips when their turn comes round. In Africa, a hearty meal—off something which here at home we should give to our pigs—seems to reconcile any gentleman of average philosophy to dissolution by violence. Nay, even in England there is sometimes exhibited an equal callousness as to that question supposed to be so engrossing, Are we to live or to die? A few years before the introduction of the new police, one Johnson was brought up at Bow Street upon the charge of hanging a certain Robert Wynd, his friend. Two watchmen had actually caught him, upon some waste ground with a little convenient timber on it, employed in this very act, and Wynd was black in the face and insensible when they cut him down. No sooner did he recover than he proceeded to attempt to rescue his companion, and therefore was himself charged with obstructing the officers in the execution of their duty. It came out, in evidence, that both the prisoners were greatly given to gambling, but having lost all they had, could get nobody to engage with them at their favourite game, which, if I remember right, was cribbage. They were therefore compelled to play with one another, and having nothing else to risk, each literally 'staked his existence.' Whoever won was to have the privilege of putting the other to death, and fortune had declared herself in favour of Mr. Johnson. Not only did this gentleman most vehemently insist upon his rights, but Wynd upon his part was perfectly willing to pay forfeit; and even after being 'worked off,' and resuscitated—when it became a very nice point of honour as to whether he was not free of his agreement—resented, as has been described, the interference of the watchmen, and expressed his readiness and even desire to suffer death. Of course the religious element was totally absent in this case, and what the poor wretch

expected was extinction. It is indeed impossible that persons not called upon to risk life by duty or necessity, should do so, as they often do, if the terror attached to the loss of it were so universal or so extreme. I remember being in the crowd at the corner of King William Street upon a certain Lord Mayor's day, just as the civic procession was about to pass by. The pressure was extreme, and there were cries and screams from all sides from women and children who were in danger of being crushed. It was difficult even for a strong man to keep his legs, and yet in the centre of us all was a street acrobat, balancing a pole of at least forty feet high, upon the top of which was his mate, pretending to swim, and performing all sorts of agile feats. Of himself, he could probably take care, like M. Blondin or any other professor of lofty tumbling; but his safety was solely and wholly dependent upon the man below; and any unexpected heave of the tossing throng, or even a policeman moving sharply through the press (as a policeman alone could do), would have been his death-warrant. Apart from this indifference to life in very many, to most of us who are accustomed to stand face to face with death, or who can contemplate, at leisure, his sure approach, his features lose much of their grisly terror. It is when he makes his sudden appearance, when totally unlooked for, that he shows himself the king, and we confess ourselves with such servility to be his subjects. Let one cry 'Fire!' in a theatre, and only some half-dozen of all the mighty concourse will retain their manliness.

I recollect such an occurrence, in a provincial town in the United States, where not only was the playhouse crammed with people, but the edifice was built of wood. This fact, so common in that out-of-the-way district that it probably had never occurred to one out of fifty of the audience before, seemed to strike them all at the first alarm. No stampede of frightened cattle could have been more complete than that frantic rush of human beings towards the doors. A gentleman in front of me had just left his place, taking out with him his wife and child. I had noticed that he was very white, and thought

he was unwell. He had been the first, as it afterwards turned out, to suspect the dreadful truth, but until he reached the open air he had not ventured to disclose it. If, with those helpless dear ones in his charge, he really foresaw what was to happen, I cannot blame him. Two or three others almost immediately afterwards strove to do the like, but in the meantime the fatal cry had been raised, from some one less prudent, in the boxes, and that whole mass of civilised, educated, Christian folk, in fashionable apparel and fine linen, was transformed upon the instant into a tribe of yelling savages.

For my own part, I had my wits sufficiently about me to know that to attempt egress through any one of the few narrow doors that offered, already choked with struggling hundreds, was mere hopeless frenzy. One man, and one only, in my immediate neighbourhood seemed to be of the same mind. He kept his place, a few seats off, with his eyes still fixed upon the stage, from which the performers had fled ; in a vast space already emptied of the late occupants, were we two alone, while at its edge the crowd shrieked and strove, and clambered one upon the other, while the smoke, from we knew not whence, began to gain consistence, and make a lurid glare, where before had been only splendour and brightness. Suddenly a flash of hope started through me, and then a shudder of fear, lest the same idea should strike others, and render my way of escape impracticable like the rest. Nothing but the panic in which all were plunged could account for the little door within the orchestra being forgotten. But the musicians did not happen to be in their places when the alarm was raised, and the space they occupied was shut in by a hoarding sufficiently high to prevent the little hole of ingress from beneath the stage from being seen. Out of sight it was thus forgotten altogether. As I stole towards it, I had to pass by this man, so philosophic and calm (as I had deemed him) in the midst of such deadly peril. I had been hitherto behind him, but one look at his face convinced me that his quiet did not at all events arise from fortitude. Large drops of perspiration stood upon his forehead ; his face

was livid ; his lips endeavoured to address me in vain. He was paralysed, as I now imagined, by excessive and abject fear. His eyes only, straining towards the orchestra door—which was even more hidden than it would otherwise have been, by the big drum—convinced me that he was aware of my intention, and even that he had anticipated it.

‘Take me with you, and I will give you ten thousand dollars,’ cried he in a hoarse whisper. ‘Take me with you, I say.’

There was a curious implication of threat and insolent demand in his deep hard tones that struck me even at that moment of haste and peril ; but I only answered : ‘Be silent, fool, and come on ; there is no time to lose.’

‘I am a cripple, and cannot stir,’ replied he. ‘Refuse me, and I will cry aloud to all these people, and then both you and they will be crushed to death.’

I swear that it was not his menace which moved me to take him upon my shoulders. I was touched by his forlorn condition, paralysed as I now perceived he was in one of his limbs, and incapable even of rising without assistance.

‘Ten thousand dollars,’ whispered he into my ear ; ‘and a good deed, and a good deed.’

It was evident that he was a gentleman engaged in commercial pursuits, or, at all events, one accustomed to estimate profits in all their bearings.

So engaged were the rest of the people in the body of the house in their terrible conflict—for such the struggle had by this time become—that they did not pay any attention to us two upon our way to the orchestra ; but it was a long business getting my helpless burthen over the high barrier, and no sooner had I accomplished it than I heard an inarticulate cry of rage and desire break forth behind us, which told me that our intention was guessed. Then there came a storm of feet. Now, the door of exit was so very small, that no person could pass through it without stooping ; the carrying a man out upon shoulder-back was out of the question, so I had to push my companion feet foremost before me, just as though he had

been something inanimate, like a wheel-barrow. This, of course, took time ; and I had hardly got him well through, and had emerged myself, when the maddened throng were upon us. It was the most terrible sight the imagination can conceive. In eagerness and fury, the poor, wretched people came on like blood-hounds, not indeed thirsting for *our* lives, but each bent upon saving his own, no matter at whose expense. There were scarcely any women among them. Only the strongest and least encumbered could have cleared the many rows of seats and the orchestra partition in that marvellously short time. But, alas, all their labour was in vain. They came upon the low aperture a struggling, knotted mass, and could no more make their way through it than if there had been no opening whatsoever. I saw this as I cast one hurried glance behind me, ere I made for a dull light, which was *not* fire, gleaming at the far end of the dark space in which we found ourselves. In another minute, we were safe in a narrow lane outside the theatre. Setting down my living burden, I rushed round to the main entrance, where, as I expected, the street was already densely crowded, for the tidings of the catastrophe had spread far and wide. But as yet there was not a gleam of flame to be seen ; only the same knotted throng I had just seen twisting and coiling out of the single door of egress, and a dreadful agonised murmur among the spectators, who knew not how to help them. To stand back, and give room for escape was all that could be done. I seized a fireman by the arm, and in a few seconds put him in possession of what was happening at the back of the house.

He hastily communicated with his superior, and in less time than it takes to tell it, both ends of the lane were guarded, to keep it clear ; and half-a-dozen men with axes and crowbars were detailed to enter the place beneath the stage, and break down the orchestra planking that imprisoned those unfortunates. Many of them were cruelly maimed, but not a single death occurred either there or elsewhere. The rush after our two selves had diverted a mass of people from the choked passages,

and in time set them free, although, had the fire increased apace, but few indeed would have escaped. The house was very full of smoke, but this was traced to a lumber-room above stairs, where some stage properties were smouldering; but this was nipped in the bud before it blossomed into the direful flower, flame. Still, I shall never forget that scene of panic. As for my paralysed friend, he found the means of locomotion from the spot where I had placed him; and I heard of him the other day, for the first time, at a party of savans and philosophers here in London, where the question of the value set upon life by its possessors was being debated, and especially the subject—which heads this paper—of *Buying Life*. Cases such as I have instanced, where it had been bought, absolutely purchased by money, were cited, and among them a curious adventure in an American theatre, where a rich man, who was a cripple, had bribed a stranger, upon an alarm of fire, to carry him out like another Anchises upon his pious shoulders—for ten thousand dollars!

‘Sir,’ said I, to the cosmopolitan gentleman who was telling this anecdote—picked up, he confessed, he knew not from what source—‘the man you speak of got even a cheaper bargain than you represent; for if he did purchase his safety at the price you mention, I can inform you upon the best authority that he never paid the money.’

This personal experience of my own elicited others bearing upon this matter, and two of a very interesting character. They had both reference to the purchasing of life at sea.

Some years ago, when the communication between England and Ireland was not so rapid or so frequent as at present, a gentleman of some property, whom we will call Mr. Handsworth, embarked at Liverpool for Dublin in a sailing packet, which (most fortunately for himself) did not happen to carry his majesty’s mails. His constitution was delicate, and so greatly affected by sea-sickness, that before he had been at sea a couple of hours he broke a blood-vessel. There was a surgeon on board

who did all he could for him, but the sea was rough, and the vessel pitched exceedingly, for the wind was almost dead against her.

‘It is my duty to tell you, Mr. Handsworth,’ said this gentleman gravely, ‘that it is impossible you can ever reach Ireland alive.’

‘Of that I am well convinced,’ returned the patient despondingly; ‘and my sufferings are such that I hope death is not far off.’

But the sick man’s wife took the doctor aside, and said: ‘If the vessel put back to Liverpool, when the wind would be behind us, and we should reach land in an hour, would there not be hope for my husband then?’

‘Certainly there would,’ returned he. ‘But the thing could not be done. There are many persons on board to whom time is of importance——’

‘Surely not of such importance as is to us,’ interrupted the lady plaintively. ‘We are rich, doctor; and I would cheerfully give all we have to save my husband’s life.’

‘How much can you promise?’ enquired the other. ‘Be sure I do not ask this for my own sake; but it is necessary that I should know.’

So the lady made a hasty calculation of what she and her husband had to offer for the redemption of his life, and the doctor left the cabin to see what could be done.

At first the skipper stoutly declared that to put back was out of the question; that it was as much as his place was worth; that he had his duty to perform to his owners; and finally, that even if such were not the case, there were the passengers, any one of whom objecting to return would settle the matter, since he would have good ground for action against the packet company.

‘Very true,’ said the doctor; ‘but if I can come to terms with the passengers, promise me that you yourself will not be deaf to reason and humanity, and, let us say, five hundred pounds.’

‘Well,’ rejoined the skipper, ‘if you can persuade all the passengers, fore and aft, I dare say the poor gentleman will not have to lay his death at my door. The sum

you mention will amply repay all concerned with the ship, and if less suffices, I will return the difference.'

So the doctor convened a meeting of the passengers, and set before them in simple but moving terms the exact state of the case, bringing forward the wife of the patient to corroborate his statement, and perhaps, too, with the design of making a greater impression upon their feelings. The few gentry and rich persons who were on board acquiesced in the humane arrangement, and the poor, to their honour, were for the most part not one whit behind them. Only one or two murmured (but grumbling rather than actually refusing) of what they should lose by the delay.

'Nobody shall lose,' said the doctor; 'all reasonable claims shall be allowed. I am sure there is no man here who will take advantage of a fellow-creature's hour of need to exaggerate his loss.'

The doctor was right. Although there were a large number of fore-cabin passengers, less than double the sum which he had offered to the captain sufficed to obtain the consent of every soul on board. The vessel was put back at once, and Mr. Handsworth's life was saved.

I will conclude this paper with even a still more curious instance of Buying Life, which likewise occurred at sea. Without intelligence and science, it is true that even money would in this case have been useless; but *without* money, life must have been lost. The circumstances are as follows.

Not many years ago, a young Englishman of the name of Chapman, enjoying a good position in commercial life in Calcutta, was obliged, on account of failing health, to return to his native country. It was considered by his medical attendants that a long sea-voyage would likely be beneficial, so instead of going the overland route, he embarked in a vessel which went 'round the Cape.' Very soon after he had started, however, it became evident that his physicians had been mistaken. The motion of the ship produced excessive nausea, weakness, and finally total prostration. He loathed every kind of

nourishment, and what was given him did him no good. By the time he reached the Cape, indeed, he was worn to a shadow, and was carried out and placed in an hotel at Cape Town more dead than alive, while the steamer went on without him. Here, under the skilful attendance of a certain surgeon, whom we will call Mr. Ayliffe, he gradually recovered, until he became not worse, although no better, than when he started from Calcutta. His mind was most anxiously fixed upon getting to England, where kind friends awaited him; and yet he was perfectly persuaded that directly he set foot on shipboard, his malady would return, and that it was out of all reason to imagine that he could ever reach home alive.

Under these circumstances, he was doomed to be an involuntary exile for life in Cape Colony; for the land journey across Africa, including as it did the Mountains of the Moon and the Desert of the Great Sahara, was not one to be undertaken by an invalid. Among the singular positions in which even civilised man is still occasionally placed, this of Mr. Chapman's was surely one of the most remarkable. All the king's horses and all the king's men, as the ballad says, could not convey or convoy him by land; all the steamships and all the sailing-vessels could not take him by sea. His case defied the improvements and scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century, and indeed appeared to be hopeless. Nothing remained for him but to marry and 'settle.' English ladies are scarce in that locality, and he might have had even to penetrate to Caffraria, and ally himself with a Hottentot, or, worse, have a Boer for a brother-in-law. I defy my readers to guess how Mr. Thomas Chapman escaped from these perils, and arrived in England safe and sound; but yet—and remember I am telling a perfectly true story—he did so.

Touched by his patient's yearning after home, Mr. Ayliffe had turned over in his own mind all sorts of devices to obtain this desired end, and at last he hit upon the right one. He caused a sort of four-post bed to be constructed, with curtains that shut closely all about it; and upon the arrival of the first ship with a vacant cabin,

he suspended the whole affair to the ceiling thereof by means of a ball-and-socket chain. In this curtained room, as one may call it, Mr. Chapman was placed ; and he arrived in England without having suffered the least sickness. The ball-and-socket arrangement accommodated itself to every movement of the ship, so that he maintained his level ; while the close-drawn curtains prevented him from perceiving that other things lost their equilibrium.* In fact, he was not able to perceive that he was on board a ship at all. I do not know how much the apparatus cost, nor what sum his gratitude dictated to be paid to the wise surgeon ; but it is certain that with that money he ransomed himself from exile, and bought his life.

* It has been said that a device of a similar kind was used by George IV., to prevent sea-sickness in his yacht-expeditions, but without such complete success. Yet surely it would be well worth the while of wealthy folks who suffer from this ailment, and have to make long voyages, to take advantage of whatever mitigation this plan may afford.





MRS. R.'S ADVENTURE.

AS it is my intention to describe one of the most thrilling incidents which ever occurred in the existence of any lady moving in the upper circles of society, and as that lady is myself, the public must kindly content themselves with the above heading. They will be doubtless desirous to learn the name in full of the heroine of so tremendous a catastrophe—being a female myself, I can easily pardon so natural a curiosity—but I cannot furnish more than the initial letter. My nerves are not what they were previous to the overwhelming experience about to be narrated, and I feel that I am not equal to the further trial which publicity would entail upon me. I could not receive the thousand-and-one expressions of sympathy which would certainly flow in, after such a revelation, from all quarters—deputations from numbers of my own sex and position in life—condolences, very likely, from Royalty itself—subscriptions, addresses, a memorial fund, and perhaps even a monument.

If the feelings, doing such honour to our common nature in the case supposed, should take that very permanent form of expression I have last mentioned—a monument, erected in memory of my unparalleled sufferings, it would undoubtedly be that of a stone omnibus—for it was when travelling in an omnibus that this torture was endured—a granite 'bus, as it seemed to poor, friendless me, at the time, with driver of black marble (but of

him I only saw the boots through the inside window), and with a conductor of impenetrable adamant.

I do not belong to a rank of society, please to understand, which is in the habit of using public conveyances, and far less 'buses, at all. When I wish to take the air or go a-shopping, I 'touch a bell,' like Mr. Secretary Stanton, and observe: 'The brougham at 3 or 4,' as the case may be, and it comes to the door accordingly; but my husband having been less pressed by professional business of late than usual, and the last few mornings being fine, he had observed: 'Let us have no brougham but Vaux;' and although I did not quite understand his meaning, I was very well content to accompany him on foot, for it is not always one can get a husband to go shopping.

He had been in my company to sit for a crystal cube portrait, to give me on our marriage-day; and all seemed sunshine, as it sometimes does when the greatest misfortunes are awaiting. No sooner had we left the establishment in question at Charing Cross, than it began to rain—one of those sudden and violent downfalls, which really seem to be the result of some accident in the main of nature's water-works—as though the grandmother of all buckets, as the Persians say, was emptying; and our cry was 'Cab, cab, cab!' and still they did not come. No two expressions in the human face divine are perhaps more different than the look of a cabman who wants a fare, and the look of a cabman when he doesn't. In the one case, he is sprightly, intelligent, obliging, eager; in the other he is morose, phlegmatic, repulsive, as though all the world was indeed the orange to which it is so often likened, and he had squeezed it flat, and there was nothing more to be got out of it. He takes no notice of cries, gestures, importunities of half-drowned persons, for it is *his* turn now to be deaf to the solicitations of his fellow-creatures, and blind to all the signals of the human semaphore. Nay, he enjoys the sufferings of the non-umbrella'd, for, as my husband quotes from Milton or somebody, 'Fair is foul, and foul is *fare*,' with the London cabmen.

Although observing hitherto these unpleasant characteristics as an uninterested spectator only, and knowing nothing of their hideous attempts at overcharge, and dreadful language when withstood, except from hearsay, I have always hated cabmen and their cabs ; but I could never have imagined that any vehicle, either upon two wheels or four, could have filled me with such unimaginable loathing as that with which I now regard a 'bus. I have said that we could get no cab, and the wet was pouring through my delicate parasol as through a sieve, when my husband suddenly exclaimed : ' Come, here's a roof, at all events,' and hailed a Notting Hill omnibus.

'Never !' exclaimed I.

'Come along,' cried he ; 'don't be ridiculous ;' and while still feebly resisting, I found myself on the step of this—this mammoth machine. On the step, but by no means inside. The machine, indeed, was large, but it was not large *enough*. I read afterwards, upon a scroll above the door, the startling fact that it was licensed to carry twelve insides ; and I am sure they must have been all there besides the passengers. Four females were already within ; and above the sea of crinoline, the hats and heads of six gentlemen were visible. My husband and myself, I was given to understand, would make up the party. I will not wound the sensibilities of my readers by describing my emotions during my passage from one end of that vehicle to the other. I will only say that—doubtless from experience of what it was best and kindest to do—every passenger gave my dress a pull as I squeezed by him ; and that, when I reached the furthest corner, and sat down (if we may call it sitting), I registered a mental vow that I would not get out again until everybody else had done so. My husband followed, as the lawyers say, 'on the same side ;' and if he had a square inch of sitting-room, it was as much as he had, and a good deal of that was sharp steel.

'My dear,' said I, perceiving the expression of his countenance, 'it's no use muttering those dreadful words ; I can't help it. I can't make my crinoline smaller.'

'Well, then, I can't stand it,' replied he. 'I shall get

out, and go to the club. I'll tell the cad to put you down at Westbourn Terrace.'

'Oh, my goodness!' cried I, 'you are not going to leave me in this dreadful place alone.'

'The 'bus passes almost your very door,' says he; 'you cannot meet with anything unpleasant; it isn't as though there was nobody *in* the 'bus to protect you. [It certainly was not.] Have you got some money with you?'

'Yes,' returned I, with a sort of calm despair; 'I have got my purse; for I feel its silver clasp running into me, and hurting me very much.'

'That is all right,' said he, without thinking, I hope, of what he was saying; 'but I'm [something which I didn't quite catch] if I stand this any longer.'

The next moment I was alone—that is to say, there were fellow-creatures all around, but not a drop of sympathy which could be depended upon, among them all.

Hermit never was half so lone
As he who hath fellows, but friend not one—

and this is especially true of a lady of quality in a crowded omnibus. For some little time, the novelty of my situation prevented my feeling how forlorn I was. The rattle of this species of vehicle is not to be described by mere words, and is of a character to confuse the intelligence of the most collected. I suppose the class of persons who use 'buses delight in this rough music, or they would surely insist upon it being stopped. Close beside me was what I took at first to be some anatomical curiosity in a glass-case; but these were the legs of the driver, seen through a little window, as above mentioned; this spectacle also affords, I suppose, some pleasure, or it would surely be excluded from the view of the passengers. Ever since my husband's departure, the cad had never ceased to exclaim, in an excited and irritable manner, '*Rilloke · Rilloke ·*'* by which artful exclamation, as I subsequently

* The exclamation which our fair correspondent describes must, we think, have been intended for *Royal Oak*, a public-house in Bayswater, which is a great halting-place for omnibuses.

made out, he was striving to lure some other person to occupy the superficies I have already alluded to ; but in this infamous purpose, I am happy to say, he did not succeed. Although unable to look out of window (*except* at the legs of the driver), by reason of intervening opaque bodies (the size, by-the-bye, of all my fellow-passengers was stupendous, although continued travel in such conveyances would, I should have imagined, produced tenuity), I was yet enabled to calculate by the time consumed that I must be getting near my destination. One or two persons having left the vehicle, I began to think that I might be able to extricate myself without much difficulty. So I felt for my purse, and by exertions, which I may fairly designate as 'superhuman,' managed to get it out of my pocket. First I felt in the gold department, simply because one's fingers always do get there when one wants the silver one. One never carries gold, when one goes out with one's husband shopping, for obvious reasons, and therefore I was not surprised to find none. Then I felt in the silver department ; and a shudder shook my frame, for there was nothing there. However, I always carry stamps, and the man would surely take twelve stamps instead of four-pence. Alas, that very morning I had given my sister all my stamps save one to put on a quantity of charity circulars she was posting ; and that one she had laughingly refused to take upon the ground that it had no gum on it, and looked as if it had been used before. *That doubtful stamp was all that I now found myself possessed of in the way of legal tender !*

Hot and cold, pale and flushed, fever-dry and damp with the dews of terror—all these physical changes took me one after the other, while mentally my reason was shaken to its very centre. I had never been in the position of an unprotected female before. I scarcely knew what it was to be without a coachman and footman within call. As to being *alone* and *penniless*, I could scarcely picture to myself the actual horrors of such a situation. At this moment, over the shoulder of my opposite neighbour, I beheld a prison-van pass by, as though it had been sent me for a sign. A little later, while I was still

devising scheme after scheme of escape, and dismissing one after the other as impracticable, a mob of people obstructed our progress, the figures in the foreground of which were a policeman and a lady elegantly dressed, the latter of whom had been taken up for shop-lifting. 'Serve her right, Ma'am,' observed the only member of my own sex now left in the vehicle; and the uncompromising way in which she said it shattered in an instant the resolve I had formed of asking her—for the love of all she held sacred—to lend me a fourpenny-bit. I felt certain she would see me borne away to prison or the hulks, or whatever dreadful destination my circumstances might earn for me, without a pang of pity. I fancied I remembered the very words of some penal statute specially directed against persons who obtained a ride in a public conveyance *under false pretences*—the last three words in particular were impressed upon my memory. How many days would elapse, I wondered, before I should be permitted to communicate with my husband?

As for asking a strange gentleman to lend me fourpence, I was sure that I could never do that. I felt, to begin with, that I should scarcely be able to make myself heard in the turmoil, and that he would reiterate: 'What, Ma'am?' and make me repeat the dreadful request a dozen times.

And now we were getting awfully near the terrace for which I was bound. We passed through Westbourn Place, where there were many tradesmen's shops with which I dealt; and perhaps I could have persuaded the conductor to step with me into the grocer's or the hair-dresser's, and so get paid; but I dared not let these people know that I ever travelled in an omnibus; it would get all over the neighbourhood; no—anything was better than such a disclosure as that. Past the gleaming shops we rattled, and into the familiar terrace, within a stonethrow of my happy home!

'The lady for Westbourn Terrace,' cried the conductor, stopping the vehicle, and flinging open the door with a crash.

'Never mind,' said I, feebly—'never mind, my good

man; it's of no consequence; I'll go on a little further.'

'Just as you please, Ma'am,' returned the conductor, looking at me rather queerly; 'there's no hextra charge to the journey's end.'

'Thank goodness for that,' murmured I; 'I cannot, then, be declared a defaulter to a greater extent than fourpence. The offence is not increased by my sitting here; and surely procrastination is better than the immediate peril. By waiting until this horrid machine stops, I shall have an opportunity of private conference with this man, and my passionate appeal may move him.' Not, however, that I had much hope of this; for he was a hard and shining man, upon whom the rain seemed to have no effect beyond making him shine the more; and tears would probably be even less regarded.

After I had observed that 'It was of no consequence where I got out,' the other passengers all fixed their eyes upon me furtively, and although evidently strangers to one another, exchanged meaning looks among themselves. I knew very well what they were winking about. They concluded I was out of my mind; and when I thought of the dear children at home, flattening their noses against the drawing-room window, in hopeful expectation of their mamma's return, and of the loose money that was lying in my dressing-case, any smallest coin of which would be worth forty times its weight in virgin gold, if it was only in my pocket instead of *there*, I felt that I was very nearly going mad in reality. However, these wretches all got out, one after another; and I heard the conductor scramble over the roof of the vehicle, doubtless to tell his friend the driver what a queer fare they had got inside, who was determined to have her money's worth by going as far as it would take her. For one moment, the idea of taking the opportunity of the door being left unguarded, crossed my mind; but remembering how very dangerous I had always heard it was to attempt to leave a carriage while in rapid motion, I put aside that unworthy scheme with honest indignation. We were now going very fast, and thereby I learned by experience why

it is they pack people into omnibuses like figs in a drum. If this were not done, the inmates would be tossed violently from side to side, as *I* was, like parched pease in a frying-pan. I also learned for the first time on this occasion how very far London extends westward, and what a number of—I dare say respectable—persons live on the wrong side of Westbourn Terrace. At last, amidst a neighbourhood which appeared to have been built the day before yesterday, the machine stopped in front of an unfinished public-house, round which all the disreputable persons who could be gathered together in so out-of-the-way a district, appeared to be collected. The moment of confession had arrived, and I was not unprepared, by this time, to address the court—I mean the conductor—in mitigation. I stood on the step, and laid my laced parasol upon his arm, in order to emphasise the statement that my husband had forgotten to leave with me the amount of my fare.

‘The gentleman,’ said I, ‘who got out in Regent Street——’

‘All right, Mum,’ interrupted the man, touching his hat, I am bound to say, with civility and discernment. ‘*He* paid for you, ’cos he said it would save trouble.’

I thought I should have fainted with joy. Save trouble! He had preserved my reputation, my liberty, my very life, perhaps! I never felt so truly glad that I was married, never so thoroughly appreciated the advantages of a husband. It was fortunate that this feeling overwhelmed all others, or I do think, in the first burst of gratitude, I should have embraced that hard and shining man. Instead of that, however, I merely observed: ‘Can I get a cab? I want to go to Westbourn Terrace.’

‘Well, upon my life!’ exclaimed he, slapping his leg. Then turning to the reddest of all the red-nosed throng around us, he added: ‘Jem, bring your cab up; here’s a fare.’

While the cab was being brought up, I once more retired into the interior of the machine, and heard the conductor explaining to his friends the peculiar idiosyncrasy of the lady inside.

‘Man and boy,’ said he, ‘I a bin with ’buses thirty year; but I never seed nothin’ like this. Now, she’s a-going back, and you may depend upon it she’ll be here again’ [I shuddered] ‘before the day’s out. She’s what they call a many-moniac. There’s been nothing like her, in a public conveyance, since Mr. Hunt——’

Here the vehicle arrived, and I made my escape; but I quite agree with what that conductor was about to observe. Nothing so terrible has occurred in a public conveyance since the criminal alluded to poisoned a whole cabful of people, as that adventure of mine in the Notting Hill ’bus.





A THREE-LEGGED IMPOSTOR.

WE are all familiar with that indomitable sailor who, notwithstanding the severity of the season (and, indeed, the colder it is, the better it suits him), sits with (apparently) *no* legs upon the pavement, while before him is spread a highly-coloured illustration of the catastrophe (the blowing up of a three-decker in action) by which he lost his limbs; we are also acquainted with his less interesting nautical brother, who, with but (apparently) *one* leg, limps along our streets, with a doleful ditty describing the circumstance (a cannon-ball or a fall from the mast-head) to which he is indebted for *his* mutilation; but a *three-legged* impostor has not yet been palmed off even upon that credulous world, the indiscriminate charity-bestowers of our large towns; and it is with some hope of imparting novel information that we beg to introduce this designing tripod to our readers. Many of them have doubtless already heard of it. A popular periodical, very accurately described the fair monster, several months ago, in temperate and judicial language; for it is (I blush to say it) of the female sex, and that fact perhaps softened the heart of a too impressionable editor; but the fact is, and should be made public, that *Planchette* (for that is her name) is an infamous creature, clothed with lies; and whoever purchases her, under a contrary impression, will find themselves grievously mistaken. It is true that even her

patrons allow that she is not trustworthy ; that her statements are wild and wayward ; but her moral obliquity is not what we complain of : if she would only speak, if it were but to say to her purchaser : ‘ You ninny ’ (which, by-the-bye, would be the reverse of a false word), I should be content. But she says *nothing* ; and my ten-and-sixpence has been extracted from me under worse than false pretences.

Let me give a description of this offender, that the public may recognise her at first sight, and being forewarned, be forearmed. Planchette, then, is a board, shaped like a heart, about eight inches long by seven wide in its widest part ; she is supported on three legs—namely, on two pentagraph wheels (on which she moves about, when pushed, very freely), and one soft pencil, with which she writes (or rather is said to write) her mystic statements. The method is to place Planchette upon a sheet of white paper or cardboard ; then two persons lay their hands very lightly on her, and after a bit, say her admirers, she will resolve any question propounded by a third person. Having read the account, already alluded to, of this female phenomenon, I enquired of my friends if she was known to any of them. Several of them replied in the affirmative. Planchette could not only tell the past, but the future ; and as for the present, matters passing on the other side of the globe were just as much within her ken as what was going on in the same room with her. But all this was hearsay. Only two of my friends spoke from personal experience of the witch ; one, an accomplished lady ; the other, not only a scholar, but (what was more singular in such a case of credulity) a man of quickness and humour. The stories they told of Planchette (and which it is certain they believed) were marvellous. She had revealed to them the death of a friend in another hemisphere at the hour of his demise, and indicated the priest who attended him in his last moments. But, indeed, by their own account, she performed such miracles in their presence, that when one of my two informants said : ‘ I could never have believed it if I

had not seen it,' I hastened to intrench myself behind that rampart likewise—and am holding that position to this hour. There was no pretence of this tripod's being exclusively spiritual in her manifestations. She did not concern herself solely with death, or other serious subjects, but would condescend to light banter and commonplaces. In this last phase, however, she was sometimes quite as striking as when employed in the annihilation of time and space to make two lovers (of the marvellous) happy. I give an instance, related to me, it should be borne in mind, by a gentleman whose word about any other matter would never be doubted, and who, in this case, very seriously pledged it to the truth of what he told. Planchette (of whom he honestly avowed his belief that she was an emissary of the devil) had taken, perhaps on that account, a peculiar enmity to him, and delighted in issuing libels against him—whether scrawling them on cardboard with the help of pentagraph wheels constitutes 'publication,' is a point I am not lawyer enough to decide—and, in particular, in inventing about him very incredible and foolish lies. A friend of his, at the other end of London, who gave up a good deal of time to the tripod, drove over to him one day, when the lady I have mentioned (a near relation of his) happened to be staying in his house. 'O Smith,' said he (or let us suppose so, for O. Smith was not his real name), 'what do you think my Planchette has been saying about you this morning?'

'Something very false and very silly, I have no doubt,' returned Smith, who, however, if he had known of any efficacious form of exorcism, would certainly have used it. 'What did the demon say?'

'Well, I was just passing a few minutes with her after breakfast—you know, she talks to me alone quite freely—and asked her, amongst other things: "What is Smith, your enemy, doing just now?" "He's mending his boots with a poker," scrawled she immediately, as fast as she could.—Just fancy! could malignity of invention take a more ludicrous form than that?'

'But this is most extraordinary,' exclaimed Smith and the lady simultaneously, and looking at one another in

blank dismay ; for the fact was, that Smith had gone out that morning (it being a wet one) in goloshes ; and on his return, forgetting that his soles were india-rubber ones, had scraped his shoes as usual on the scraper, and thereby cut one of them. Being both ingenious and economical, he then much astonished the lady in question by coming into the parlour (where she was) heating the poker, and proceeding to cure his mishap by the process which surgeons call, or used to call, the actual cautery.

‘Why, you *did* mend your boots with a poker this very morning !’ exclaimed the lady.

‘I know I did,’ said he, more quietly. ‘I always said Planchette was a demon.’

I may here say that the most singular part of the Planchette mystery, as it seems to me, is now narrated : that two independent witnesses, a gentleman and a lady, whom I know to be honest and right-thinking persons, should agree to concoct a foolish falsehood, and to back it by the most serious asseverations, is almost as incredible as the story itself. Yet they either did so, or the story is true.

At all events, much excited by this statement, as well as by the other wonderful relations, I determined to procure a Planchette. In vain Smith assured me that I had better not, for that it was playing into the hands of the Evil One to ask her any questions.

‘Be she a spirit of health,’ returned I, ‘or goblin damned,
Bring with her airs from heaven or blasts from hell,
Be her intents wicked or charitable,
And even though she cost me twelve-and-sixpence,
Planchette I’ll buy.

Planchette was rather exacting in her demands as compared with those of other wise women ; but then *their* business is mainly confined to maid-servants, whereas this lady was fashionable to an extreme degree. ‘I have sold,’ says one of the few who deal in this engaging tripod, ‘four hundred and sixty-six Planchettes, and have sent others abroad.’ And then think of her manifestations ! Even from the temperate account of her in the

periodical above referred to, I learned that she could tell you the text of Mr. Spurgeon's morning sermon any afternoon, although not (as I gathered) before it had been preached. She could tell you the letters (such as W. A. L. K. E. R., for instance) engraved on the inside of a locket, the very existence of which was unknown to any but one's self. It could indicate the persons you had written to any day, and even supply their Christian names, if you were ignorant of them, and were compelled to address '—Jones, Esq.' On the other hand, it showed an ignorance almost as surprising as its knowledge, for it was by no means good at spelling, and *insisted*, in spite of the best advice, upon writing commander with one *m*. 'Generally'—and I think this a *little* suspicious—'its blunders in orthography are the blunders of those whose hands are upon it. For example—it wrote a French word for me, and put an accent on it which should not have been there, because I believed it should be there; and in writing a Latin word for a lady, it spelled it as the lady thought it should be spelled—wrong.'

This frank avowal on the part of the writer of the paper rather attracted me than otherwise to the tripod; but when I had read a little book entitled *The Planchette, or Thought-writer, a Mystery*, the admission seemed quite superfluous, if not a base detraction from her virtues. I will leave out the spiritual opinions of the author of this last-named work—such as, 'I don't *know* what is mesmeric influence, but I believe it to be the direct breath of the Great Creator, and cannot be destroyed,' &c.—and stick to Planchette herself, of which this gentleman is the creator, *and who sells it*. There is nothing like leather.

Well, then, this disinterested individual informs us that, in spite of what one Mr. Bertolacci says, it is by no means immaterial of what wood the instrument is made, 'although this may be in *his* [Mr. B.'s] case, because his daughters are mediums of a very high degree; but there are thousands in whom the faculty is latent, and I submit that *they* require the instrument that years of experi-

ment and research have proved to be genuine and correctly constructed.' The author (and maker) is naturally not desirous to tell us how to turn out this instrument for ourselves. 'I will only say that the wood used must be hearty good stuff, and well dried. Laburnum, oak, ash, and many other woods will not serve, and are not rightly to be used. *Other conditions and instructions I reserve.*' [I again repeat, that notwithstanding even Miss P., there is nothing like leather.] 'As to the reason why these instruments write or draw, as they sometimes do exquisitely, I have long ceased to trouble myself: enough for me they are true; and I freely admit, that after many years' observation of the facts, I do not know whether the phenomena are spiritual, mesmeric, odic or vito-magnetic, and I therefore leave each person who studies the subject to his own opinion.' Taking advantage of the permission thus graciously accorded, I shall presently express my own opinion upon this matter, but in the meantime, let our author speak on. 'I use two woods in the manufacture of Planchettes—one is perfumed, scarce, and expensive; the other, of a cheaper and commoner kind. The cost of a Planchette is twelve-and-sixpence or seven shillings respectively.' It is not an American invention, as some persons, to the prejudice of Great Britain, have malignantly observed. 'It is French, as implied by its name "a little board." . . . It is no stranger to the French, Russian, and Spanish courts . . . and I have sold four hundred and sixty-six in England.' How any human turner or carpenter ever hit upon Planchette in the first instance, is not recorded in this pamphlet, although the present place of manufactory is very distinctly pointed out to possible purchasers; but her spiritual merits were discovered at least eight years ago, even at which period some folks were on sufficiently familiar terms with her, it seems, to call her 'Planchy.' Three of these 'tried it, without any result, and Planchy was put aside on a large sheet of paper till after dinner. You may judge their surprise when, on proceeding to resume their amusement, they found the following sentence written' [*sic*; our author often gives proof of deriving his

orthographic knowledge from Planchy] ‘on the previously blank paper: “Go to my son, and tell him that I will be with you this day month, to cause him to make such alterations as I wish in the book he is now writing.”’ Then followed the signature of an eminent personage deceased.

Our author himself, perhaps apprehensive that people might call upon him and require a sign, disclaims any personal power over the lady. ‘It might be supposed that, as I make the instrument, I can use it also; such, however, is not the case.’ The little touches of modesty to be found in this miraculous essay are indeed most charming. While eulogising Planchette’s surpassing qualities, he allows she has the feminine failing of occasionally telling fibs. ‘Not,’ says he, rather brutally, ‘that the instrument don’t tell lies sometimes; it states plainly that it does so; as, for instance, a few days since, I was with a lady of high rank’ [leather], ‘who was disappointed because the instrument I made would not write for her, but only make marks; she told me that, by a young lady laying *her* hand on it, it wrote a letter from her deceased mother full of serious advice; and that afterwards, some one present wished to know the winner of the coming Derby, the answer was: “I write lies as well as truth, and will not be troubled with such—nonsense.” This caused the young lady to desist, of course.’

Nay, our author has even the hardihood to print a letter from a customer to the effect that the instrument he first made for him, ‘about eight years ago, of mahogany, would not act, and the second only imperfectly;’ but ‘the third, my second quality, wrote messages from the late Robert Burns, and, without anyone touching the instrument, signed them.’ [I should like to compare the autograph of the deceased bard with Planchy’s spidery scrawls.] Another correspondent, a lady, states that ‘now (after a little practice) she never touches the Planchette, but ties a string to one of the casters, and it writes.’ But these two persons, even by our author’s own account, are favoured individuals, as we may learn from his *Directions for using the Planchette*.

‘Insert the pencil, and lay the instrument, wheels downward, on a sheet of foolscap or cartridge paper ; then quietly collect and bend your mind to the subject, and lay just the tips of the fingers of the right hand on the upper side for a few minutes, and if you have the power well developed, the Planchette will probably at first make irregular marks, and, after a little practice, give answers to mental and verbal questions.

‘If, however, after repeated trials—say, for about a month—you find that it will neither move, write, nor draw, and you do not perceive a sense of fulness in the fingers, nor any tremor of the hand or arm, nor a sense of pricking or stiffness in the fingers, you may fairly conclude that you have not the power to obtain answers by it (or, if you have, that it would require a longer time to develop it). I should advise you in that case to invite someone, the opposite to yourself in sex and temperament (if possible), to assist you, and both together proceed, as before directed, for a few minutes, and watch the result. If it does not move, join hands, the left in your friend’s right, and lay the disengaged hands on the Planchette. If neither influences can move it, let others try, and strictly attend to this—put the Planchette in the sun’s rays, if possible, for a few minutes, repeatedly turning it, and it will remove the influences THAT IT HAS ABSORBED, and restore it to its normal state.

‘This can at any time be done, if you have reason to suppose it has been handled by one inimical to the subject. On the supposition that you are able to obtain answers, my advice is, that you never after suffer anyone else to touch it ; prove it and treat it as your true friend ; never ask a trivial question, or you may expect a similar reply, or a reproof, or a morally wrong one ; for instance one relating to betting or horse-racing. In all probability, a correct answer would be given as a lure, with ruin for the future result, and this I know in several cases to have been the fact. Indeed, the instrument, strange to say, will teach you how to use it. Whether the influence projected on it be spiritual or vito-magnetic, I leave others to determine ; I cannot. This I

know, that entire manuscripts have been written by the Planchette, replete with interest, and not unfrequently it has given timely warning of disasters, that, by its means, have been prevented. One caution I request you to observe—do not place implicit faith in its teachings, and never forget, when not in use, to keep it in safety, as it cannot rightly be repaired; and in the dark, in a small case of lime-wood, or cedar (not pencil) is best; for, like homœopathic medicines, the light deteriorates it.'

One portion, at least, of these directions for use is likely to commend Planchette to the youth of both sexes. 'I should advise you to invite some one, the opposite to yourself in sex, if possible' [and surely this can never be impossible!], 'to assist you.' It must be a very nice amusement to place one's fingers in proximity to those of some agreeable young lady, and gaze into her lovely eyes until Planchette writes, which (to judge by my own experience) will last till any two persons, in the bloom of youth, shall become 'John Anderson my Jo' and his old woman, and even longer. As to an answer being given 'as a lure,' Planchette never cast any pitfall of that sort in *my* way. The notion of the sun's rays removing the antagonistic influences 'absorbed' by this ridiculous tripod, is charmingly audacious. Our author's faith—in the credulity of his fellow-creatures—must indeed be boundless. It is evident, with those four hundred and forty-six orders executed, and many more coming in (for the sale, of late, has greatly increased), that our author knows the folks he has to deal with, else one might well be astounded at his venturing to publish such testimony as the following by way of eulogium. One of his correspondents writes: 'Planchette only moves and scrawls about the paper for me alone, but I hope with patience to obtain satisfactory results: with several of my friends and me it does marvels. A young gentleman, a cousin of mine, manager of a bank in a neighbouring town, has wonderful power. It writes for him alone, when his fingers are a perceptible distance above the board. He is, however, a highly nervous, delicate man, and it is only

with difficulty we can get him to try his powers. In fact, he appears afraid of it, and it makes gloomy, ominous sentences under his influence, quite enough to give him reasonable grounds for his unwillingness to operate. On Sunday afternoon last, a musical friend was playing a serious strain on the piano in my house, my cousin had his hand on the board, and it wrote the following: "Come, Music, come, and sweetly give—soft influence to those who live—Oh Music—tired;" and then stopped.'

Is it possible that our author, or his correspondent, can be under the impression that this is poetry, and of such a high order as manifestly to originate from a supernatural source?

Perhaps, after all, I am unnecessarily wroth with Planchette; she is made to sell, and doubtless, whether she answers *me* or not, she answers the object of her maker. I am only one of the five hundred or more individuals who have been dazzled by her (reputed) charms, and suffered accordingly. I purchased the fair siren—more frail than fair, I am sorry to think—and even gave a little dinner-party in her honour. As soon as the cloth was removed, and without grace (lest that religious ceremony should have the effect of an exorcism), we began our séance. 'Two persons of opposite sex to one another, if possible,' laid their hands gently upon Planchette, while a third put his questions. Nothing happened of a supernatural nature; nothing happened at all. The individuals employed being conscientious, she never moved. Upon the substitution of one of these unfit personages, however, for a barrister of extensive practice, she did begin to scrawl over the cardboard, like a spider drunk. If she formed letters, they were hieroglyphics of the most unintelligible sort. A pencil, held between two fingers, would have made more definite marks. It was the most complete *fiasco* you can imagine. At last—all the questions having been hitherto unspoken—it was asked aloud how many of the five Fenians, at that time doomed to death at Manchester, would be executed. The lawyer and the lady made a desperate combined effort, and the result

was something like four fingers, as one might draw them with one's toes.

'There !' cried somebody ; ' there *is* something in it, after all. It is almost certain that one of the five will be reprieved.'

But, unfortunately for the reputation of Planchette, her prediction, as we are all aware, was not fulfilled.

One of the party was 'engaged,' and we asked for the name of his beloved object. This was also replied to by a symbol, very like nothing at all. Some thought it was intended for a profile. But I confess I could not recognise the human form divine, nor whether it was her face or her figure that was intended to be portrayed.

At last, after hours of scrawling, one, who was about to rejoin his regiment in India, enquired how many years it would be before he again came home, and the answer, so far as it could be gleaned—was a hundred thousand years ; there was something like a one, and five loops that might stand for ciphers or anything else. Then we gave up Planchette for the evening.

I have tried her often since with no better result. If she **is** a devil, she is a dumb one. In the magazine-article aforesaid, it is stated that the usual sign of her having finished her communications is, 'a sort of circular flourish round the writing.' She gives me plenty of flourishes circular and of all sorts, but no writing. I have asked Smith and the lady to come and draw Planchette out. The former has 'conscientious' objections ; and the latter has objections also, I suppose, for she don't do it.

Does anybody want to buy a Planchette, cheap? because, if so, I should like to trade. She is much the same, I believe, as when she came to me, and yet I am prepared to part with her at a great reduction. I don't think she has absorbed any antagonistic 'influences'—either odic or vito-magnetic—from me and my friends ; but if she has, I will place her in the sun's rays with pleasure. I will also guarantee that she will tell no lies. Who'll buy my three-legged impostor?



WANTED A DRIVER.

THAT the law is equally severe upon rich and poor alike when they do wrong, is a theory which nobody believes. It is so in the case of great offences, or rather, it is then of necessity *more* severe upon the rich ; for no one will deny that—their offences being equal—a term of penal servitude is a greater punishment to an Old Bailey attorney than it is to one of the class whom it is his ordinary mission to defend. But what in the mouth of the private soldier is rank blasphemy is in that of the captain but a choleric word, and so it must ever be in this world, notwithstanding that the angels weep to see it ; nay, times have been, when what was shop-lifting in the distressed needle-woman, was in the lady of fashion kleptomania. There is no more fear of social position being ‘respected’ than of the sun being shorn of its beams ; the anarchical periods when it ceases to be so being about as few, as brief, and as far between, as are total eclipses. Mr. Tennyson, while confessing himself ‘a Tory to the quick,’ narrates how, when at school, he stole ‘the fruit, the hens, the eggs’ of a flayflint in his neighbourhood ; nay, he and his fellows even stole his sow, and hauled her, great with pig, up to the leads upon their college tower ; and when she farrowed, one by one they took her progeny and roasted them, until she was ‘left alone upon her tower, the Niobe of swine.’ This was really a very strong measure, and nothing is more certain than that, if the

culprits had been workhouse boys instead of young gentlemen, they would have been sent to gaol, and we should have had some graphic reminiscences of Pentonville in the Laureate's *Ode to Memory*.

Poaching, a crime so dire in the 'eyes severe' of the justice, has seemed to himself, in his third and fourth age, a venial offence enough, and one the discovery of which only entailed 'a row' between his 'governor' and some neighbouring squire; but poor Hodge is punished, notwithstanding his youth, by hard labour and the treadmill. I don't know how much truth there is in the assertion, commonly made by the poor in London, that 'the bobbies' are unjust; but the difference of tone in which that supposed embodiment of even-handed justice, the policeman, addresses a man with a good hat and a man with a bad one, is without doubt very marked.

Certainly, a person of position, with money and friends behind him, may venture to do things which might bring very unpleasant consequences to a less fortunate person. He may no longer wrench off knockers and bell-handles, and keep a museum of such stolen property with impunity, as young gentlemen of fashion were wont to do half a century ago; and if, while driving his mail phaeton in the park at dangerous speed, he is requested by the guardian of the law to slacken his pace, and the temptation seizes him not only to disobey, but to apply his whip-lash to the shoulders of the blue-coated one—he will have to repent of it in sackcloth, or at least in prison garb: his money (very properly) shall be of no avail; the magistrate will in these days take no fine; and for that mad freak, his head shall assuredly be shaved, or at least cut uncommonly close by the warder's shears. Still, let us who are of the upper ten thousand be of good heart. The law will still think twice before it condemns persons of our condition, when it would not hesitate at all in the case of the vulgar.

It is whispered that one of her majesty's judges, in his youth—or at least before his judgment was matured—was so imprudent as to steal a horse. It was absolutely a matter of extreme doubt—his attorney called it 'a very

narrow shave'—whether his lordship would not have to be called to the wrong side of the bar; but, however, a miss is as good as a mile, and he is now on the bench. It is something to have stolen a horse, and yet to be a judge; but an incident happened to a gentleman of my acquaintance the other day which even still more exemplifies the advantages of position. He is only a barrister to be sure, and not 'my lud;' but on the other hand, he stole a horse *and cab!*

In this wise. Mr. Nathaniel Carmairs, as we will call him, is, by nature, doubtless as little inclined to larceny (let alone more serious offences) as any other gentleman in Stone Buildings. Being a lawyer, it would perhaps excite ridicule to call him strictly honest; but apart from his professional practice (which is not large), I never heard a whisper against his principles. Even if his intentions were less honourable, indeed, he is too fond of repose, to what the wise do call 'convey' what belongs to others into his own keeping; if it could be done by absorption, I might have my doubts; but he would scarcely lift a finger (far less a shop) for the sake of gain, nor even to defend his own, so long as enough was left him upon which to live with comfort. If ever there was a philosopher since the good old Grecian days, it was Nathaniel Carmairs; in whom, said his enemies, was united the keenest epicurean sense of self-gratification, with the most stoical indifference to the misfortunes of others. But one of the advantages of being a philosopher is not to care what one's enemies say, which was the case with Nathaniel. The opinion of his friends may be equally valueless; but I cannot help saying, that he has always seemed to me to be much too good-natured to deserve so harsh a judgment, and I only wish that everybody who talked as little said as few malicious things. There is a story told of him at his club in connection with a railway accident, which is very characteristic. On the *Great London and Shatterham* line there is a tunnel very favourable to collisions, and which, although a long one, has already cost the company more in compensation to their victims than they expended in its original con-

struction. But a board of directors is not a body to be dictated to by experience; and in the summer months, when the accident-season is at its height, the Shatterham tunnel is sure to create its sensation. Mr. Carmairs, having a villa residence upon this line of railway, uses it very frequently, and at last, of course, came in for the accident. He was all alone, and fast asleep, in a first-class carriage, when his train met another train face to face in the tunnel, with the usual results. He described himself as being rudely awakened by a clap of thunder, followed by an earthquake, which shook his compartment until it became more like a bundle of spills than a place adapted for repose. All was pitch-dark, save for a few glimmering lamps; and the cries of the wounded, or of those who fancied themselves wounded, reminded him (for he has no little knowledge of music) of nothing so much as the *Battle of Prague*. It was of no use appealing to any of the company's servants to bring him another carriage; the cruel necessity had arisen for personal exertion; and my friend resolved to act with vigour. He made his way amongst the *débris* of vehicles and people, until he discovered another first-class carriage in a tolerably intact condition, climbed up in it, placed his umbrella in the cradle, and his hat in the straps, put on his travelling-cap, and *fell fast asleep again*.

It is impossible to imagine that a gentleman of this placid disposition could wilfully commit a crime. But some men are born thieves; others achieve for themselves a reputation for thieving; and a few have felonies thrust upon them. This last was the case with Nathaniel Carmairs. On the occasion which I have in my mind, he had been dining at a friend's house in the neighbourhood of Clapham, and did not leave its hospitable gate till the small-hours. Perhaps his host was a congenial spirit, and they both fell asleep after dinner, and did not wake till 2 A.M.; but, at all events, it was past that time when my friend found himself in the wilds of Clapham, and he knew not how many miles from Lincoln's Inn. The notion of *walking* that distance was not repugnant to Mr. Carmairs's feelings, simply because the possibility of the

thing never entered into his mind. He had too good an opinion of the general system of the universe to suppose that a person of his consequence could be driven to that extremity. He confidently looked forward to be driven in a cab. His friend had informed him that there was a night cab-stand at a particular place, and thither he strolled, nothing doubting, and with a cigar in his mouth.

Nor had he been deceived ; the cab-stand was there ; a long strip of pavement to prevent the horses standing on wet ground ; and the bucket belonging to the waterman. Nay, there was even a hansom casting its weird shadow in the moonlight. But as for a driver, there was none to be seen. We have it upon Mr. Carmairs's own testimony that he 'called aloud' for this 'missing link' between himself and the horse, but nothing came of it except a bray from the common. 'It was not an echo,' says Nathaniel, anticipating satire, in his quiet way ; 'it was a donkey.'

Having summoned the absent cabman three times, Mr. Carmairs, although not of the common-law bar, concluded he had done all that was legally necessary, and deliberately climbed up into the vacant seat, and drove away. A more timid person might have shrunk from the responsibility of such an act ; a more mercurial one might have exulted in it, as in any other mischievous prank ; but Mr. Carmairs only felt that he was performing an irksome duty in the unjustifiable absence of the proper official. As he drew nearer town, he was more than once hailed by benighted revellers ; but he had no desire to make a penny by the transaction in which he was engaged, and refused every one of them. 'Tired,' 'Going home,' or a shake of the head whenever that response was found sufficient, were replies that shook off these importunate persons ; although if he could have relied upon any of them to drive *him*, he would have surrendered the reins with cheerfulness, got inside and been asleep in a moment, and when they reached Chancery Lane, a man should have had both horse and hansom for his trouble. But although these would-be fares strove to tempt him by pecuniary offers, as well as propositions to 'stand' a pot

of porter, and even spirits, it never struck them to make the particular overture that Mr. Carmairs would have listened to but which he himself could scarcely propose. The consequence was they had to console themselves with satire; reflections upon his white cravat and embroidered shirt-fronts, which they maintained had been feloniously acquired through the circumstance of his mother being a washerwoman; or upon his elegant gold waistcoat buttons, which they did not hesitate to stigmatise as brass; while he, on his part, had to drive himself all the way. Arrived at Lincoln's Inn, he left the horse and cab at the gate, for the convenience of any other member of the bar who might be in need of a vehicle, and went quietly to bed.

I doubt whether Nathaniel Carmairs ever gave himself a thought about that horse and cab again, for he is of a very forgiving disposition, and always endeavours to forget any trouble he may have been put to; at all events, he never mentioned it to *me*; and as I happened to be at his chambers when the following interview took place, it afforded me some considerable surprise, as well as amusement.

Nathaniel was hard at work as usual — colouring his pipe — and I was watching him, for it was too hot for active exertion, when there came a knock at the door, and immediately after it, two persons of the lower orders. The one looked like a Methodist parson out of employment; the other wore a white hat, a red neckerchief, a green waistcoat, a buff coat, and a pair of old drab trousers, with an enormous patch of new drab on the left knee; he did not therefore require the metal ornament round his neck to proclaim himself the driver of a hansom cab, who, as everybody knows, are, except the military, the gayest dressers in London.

'You know what I am come about, Mr. Carmairs,' observed this rainbow in a menacing voice; 'or if not, here is my solicitor, who can inform you.'

'Take your seats, gentlemen,' said Nathaniel; 'it is not often that I see a solicitor in these chambers, I do assure you.'

‘You were at Clapham, this day-week, Sir, as I am informed,’ observed the person in black severely; ‘and on that night, or rather on the following morning, between the hours of two and three, you took a horse and cab from the public stand near the *Roysters’ Arms*.’

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Carmairs yawning, ‘I did; but not being before the court at this particular moment, is it necessary, my dear Sir, to be so tedious? My friend here is a professional man; this forensic display is therefore thrown away.’

‘He owns that he was at Clapham; he owns that he stole the cab,’ cried the man in black, moistening his lips in preparation for another flight of eloquence: ‘now, see what follows.’

‘He is going to weary us,’ said Carmairs in an agonised tone; ‘I know he is.—Now, cabman, listen to me, if you can direct your attention from your learned friend for half a minute.—[For he was looking at ‘my solicitor’ as though he were the embodiment of the wisdom of the Court of Chancery, Ecclesiastical, and Common Law in one.] ‘I dare say, you are under the impression that you have a grievance: there—there—I thought so. Well, as a matter of fact, you have none: it is I, and not you, who ought to complain. But sooner than have to listen to you, and still more to this other gentleman, I will give you—what I very seldom get myself—a guinea. There.’

So saying, the philosopher languidly tendered those two coins, the combination of which is so dear to the physician and the barrister (and, indeed, is generally acceptable to all conditions of men)—a sovereign and a shilling.

The cabman’s eyes grew bright as his raiment, and his hand mechanically sought his forelock in the act of grateful obeisance. He would certainly have taken the money, had not ‘my solicitor’ intervened.

‘Not so fast,’ said this learned gentleman, who had no idea of giving up a case just because his client was satisfied: ‘you are not going to get off so easily as that, Mr. Carmairs. It is in our power to punish you very severely, and the compensation, if we forbear to do so, must be proportionate to the offence.’

'I *knew* he was going to be weary,' sighed Nathaniel, putting the coins back into his purse, and shutting his eyes: 'will you kindly wake me when he has done?'

'I suppose, Sir,' continued the man of law with pompous gravity, 'notwithstanding you affect to treat this affair with levity, that you know the fact?'

'The act that relates to cabmen leaving their vehicles on the street without any one to look after them?' murmured Mr. Carmairs dreamily. 'Yes; it's a misdemeanour, isn't it?'

At these pregnant words the cabman and 'my solicitor' held a whispered but animated conference, and then the latter proposed his *ultimatum*. 'I am instructed to say, Sir, that for the sum of five pounds, we will abstain from further proceedings, the mere publication of which, as you are well aware' [how little he knew Nathaniel!], 'must seriously affect your reputation. Considering the expenses my client has been put to, I can say no smaller sum, which also includes our loss of time.'

'You are losing it now,' responded Mr. Carmairs yawning; 'and what is worse, you are losing mine. You oblige me to recapitulate—which of itself, in the present state of the atmosphere, is an exhausting word. Your friend commits a misdemeanour by leaving his cab; I do not prosecute him for it; I have no intention of prosecuting him for it, although it caused me great inconvenience, by compelling me to drive myself home. I return good for evil, by offering the offender one pound one.'

'We want five pounds,' observed 'my solicitor' drily.

'Just so,' continued Mr. Carmairs with a faint smile. 'We all *do*. The majority of us, however, do not have their aspirations realised. I most sincerely wish you may get it—out of somebody else.'

'Come, Sir, what *will* you give?' enquired 'my solicitor,' suddenly exchanging his menacing gloom for an agreeable frankness. 'The fare from Clapham, to begin with, is three-and-six.'

'Now, look here,' said Mr. Carmairs, speaking with what was for him considerable distinctness and effort, and holding his hands out, as if for air; 'a gleam of reason

seems to have penetrated into what, I dare say, you call your brain. Take advantage of that lucid interval, and accept these terms, which are the last which I shall offer you. I put aside all the trouble and exertion which your client's carelessness entailed upon me on the occasion in question. *I make no charge for driving myself home.* Here is a half-crown and a shilling in satisfaction of all demands. Do you take them, or do you leave them ?'

'My solicitor' placed his head upon one side, with an embarrassed air, and scratched it thoughtfully. But 'cabby' stepped briskly forward, and before the other could interfere, had transferred the proffered coins to his own pocket, concluding that manœuvre with a slap upon their place of deposit, which evidently meant: 'Signed, sealed, and delivered ;' and so the transaction terminated.

Upon the whole, and considering the attempt that was undoubtedly made to extort money, perhaps no less was done than the justice of the case demanded. But supposing Mr. Nathaniel Carmairs, instead of being a barrister-at-law of Lincoln's Inn, had been (say) a dog-fancier in Seven Dials, who wishing to ride instead of to walk from Clapham, had driven *himself* home in a cab, under precisely similar circumstances—I shrewdly suspect that the police report that described the occurrence would not have been headed, like this paper, *Wanted, a Driver*, but, *Stealing a Horse and Cab*.





CAPTAIN STEEL'S DILEMMA.

A STORY OF THE BRITISH VOLUNTEER FORCE.

THERE are none of us (the present reader of course excepted), however charming and irresistible, without our faults. Fauntleroy, one of the pleasantest men in London, was addicted to forgery. Robespierre, surnamed 'the Incorruptible,' for his steadfastness of purpose, had a weakness for the guillotine. Cæsar, who never turned his back upon a military foe, fled from the sheriff's-officer. Madame Laffarge was young, beautiful, and accomplished, but she had a passion for the administration of arsenic. The benevolent Rousseau, who devoted himself to his fellow-creatures, sent his own children to the Foundling. Henry VIII., a genuine adorer of the fair sex—— But enough of examples. I have quoted sufficient to show to posterity that my hero, Captain Hippolyte Steel, adjutant of the Royal Blankshire Volunteers, was not the first person recorded in history whose otherwise unexceptionable character was marred by a defect. He was good-looking and patriotic, courageous and genteel; he had four hundred a year of his own in land; never smoked tobacco; was a *bonâ fide* member of the Church of England, and the best shot in his regiment—but he was not punctual. There was the rub. He had indeed a conventional respect for time,

just as men of fashion have for women, but his behaviour towards the same was abominable. In drill, it is true, he made his men keep time ; but we all know how easy it is to correct the faults of others. He never kept it himself : I think I may really say *never*.

Of course, there is a great deal of rubbish talked about the value of time. Commercial gentlemen, who pull out their watches, and mutter 'Tut, tut,' when the omnibus stops at the corner, do not impose upon the world so much as they hope to do. We are well aware it is not really a vital matter whether they begin reading the newspaper at their office at ten precisely or at 10.15. The City would not collapse if they were even an hour late, nor (between ourselves) would it be of much consequence even to *them*. They are a set of humbugs as respects the importance of their every moment ; it is one of the engines that they employ to persuade the public of the gigantic character of their operations. As though one day was not just as good as another for making money ! It is curious that even the rank and file of the commercial army affect this exaggeration of the value of their time. 'Give me twenty-four hours to turn about me,' says some poor wretch surrounded by creditors, 'and you shall all be paid.' What is the good of his turning round in twenty-four hours, like the globe itself ? 'Time is money,' runs their foolish proverb ; whereupon, it was once wittily observed : 'Then, if you give me time, it is the same thing as if I give you money.' Which is quite a new way to pay old debts.

Lawyers also make a great deal of fuss about the value of their time, but with better reason ; for they charge folks not for what they do for them, so much as for the time they take in doing it ; which is one reason, among many, why lawsuits are so prolonged. It is to the credit of the other professions that they do not boast themselves in this particular ; for although the clergy are emphatic about the value of time, it is not upon mere time's account, but on the relation which it bears to eternity. They may make vital questions out of many foolish things, but I never heard of their attaching

supreme importance to their sermons beginning exactly as the clock strikes twelve ; while, as to ending them at any particular time, I have generally noticed their congregations to be more solicitous about that than themselves. We find, indeed, it is the man who does the most work who has always the most time to give to others, and the idlest dog who has always 'no time to spare : ' he fritters away the hours he ought to employ in labour, and then complains how closely he has been kept to his desk. It is so much easier to tell how long you have been working than to explain what you have done.

I have written this much to show that I am not myself a blind devotee of Time, and therefore apt to judge Captain Hippolyte Steel with harshness. I have no personal feeling in the matter whatever : I have never waited dinner for him, nor any other man, one minute. People who do so at the risk of their whitebait being spoiled, pay a very poor compliment both to their own palates and to those guests who have arrived at the proper time. But all persons have not the courage to be just, and Hippolyte's prospects were blighted by a circumstance which, at first sight, seemed to reflect credit upon him. The Newmans of Eaton Place once waited twenty-five minutes for him, and got their turbot spoiled. This, of itself, only showed that the Newmans, being *parvenus*, were ready to abase themselves before the heir-presumptive of a baronetcy ; but old Bullion, the banker, unhappily for Hippolyte, was also of the party, and not at all inclined to abase himself. I heard what he muttered over that fish in rags, but I do not venture to repeat it. When the poor unconscious captain, drawing his chair towards him in a friendly manner at dessert, enquired : 'And how is Miss Margaret, Sir, to-day ? ' he replied : 'And what the devil is that to you, Sir ? ' Margaret Bullion being the banker's only daughter and heiress, who had been hitherto understood to be the *fiancée* of the gallant adjutant of volunteers. Never was unpunctuality so punished.

'Am *I* to be kept waiting, and get my turbot spoiled,

because this son of a baronet chooses to dawdle?' was all that the remonstrances of Margaret and her Bridesmaids (elect) could for weeks elicit from the old gentleman.

At last, when she insisted with tears: 'But he will *never, never* be late again, papa,' he was so far mollified as to permit the courtship to be renewed upon that basis.

'I am a plain business-man, Sir,' remarked he to the captain, 'and have always met my engagements to the day. It is as easy to be in time as to be after it; and if you cannot conquer a bad habit, you are not the sort of person I wish to see married to my daughter. You understand, therefore, that if you aspire to be her husband, you will not be late again for any important matter such as dinner, and least of all when I am one of the company.'

Captain Steel was proud, but he also doted upon Margaret, and he swallowed his resentment, and submitted. He only lived for her and the volunteer force. There was, of course, no pecuniary necessity for his undertaking the duties of an adjutant; but he liked the work, and did it well. He was always too late, of course; but when he once begun, he made up for lost time. His men adored him, and he would put himself to any inconvenience—short of being in time—to serve them. He had a rifle-butt erected in his own grounds, so that those to whom it was nearer than where the regimental target stood, might come and practise there. There was a shot-proof house for the marker upon one side of it, and all complete.

The time for Hippolyte's marriage was drawing very near, and it was not his intention to be late for *that*, I promise you. Indeed, since that edict of his future father-in-law, he had much improved in respect to punctuality, as I can certify, who happened to be staying with him during those last bachelor days. However late at night we played billiards, Hippolyte was always 'to the fore' at breakfast-time: and the cook was quite astonished to find master always at home when the second bell rang.

Upon a certain day, we were engaged to dine with the Bullions at their country-seat in the neighbourhood. I could hardly prevent Hippolyte from driving over there immediately after lunch, so far as to be positively sure to be in time; but I represented to him that would only look as if he had no confidence in himself. He would seem like an habitual drunkard, who dares not be merely moderate, but is obliged to take the pledge. If we started at six, we should still have a full quarter of an hour to spare. At four o'clock, Hippolyte had put on his evening clothes, in which he looked remarkably well; but still, as I observed, it was a premature proceeding. 'Never mind,' said he; 'I feel safe in these. I sha'n't have to dress, in case anything should happen to delay us.'

It was quite touching to see his anxiety and desire to amend. 'When I have once got her,' said he (referring to his beloved object), 'I'll snap my fingers at old Bullion, and make a point of never being in time for anything.'

At half-past four, who should ride up on that speedy 'weed' of his but Mr. Nolan O'Shaughnessy, of the Royal Blankshire Volunteers, one of those Irish gentlemen to be found in every corps, about whom nobody knows anything, except that there they are? He was sorry to intrude; but he had been accidentally shut out of the regimental competition last week, and was exceedingly anxious to get into Class 2. It was competent for the adjutant to admit him, if he should succeed in satisfying him of his efficiency, which half an hour's practice at the target would suffice to do.

'I doubt that, my good fellow,' said Hippolyte, 'for your shooting used to be rather wild; but I can just spare you half an hour.'

So we went out to the butt, O'Shaughnessy leading his thoroughbred, and tethering that attenuated animal to a neighbouring gate. He had characteristically omitted to bring his ammunition with him, which the adjutant had to supply.

When Steel and I had shut ourselves up in the marker's

box, which was quite an arbour-like little edifice of turf, with its one aperture close to the target, I remarked to my companion, that our friend from the Emerald Isle had rather an undisciplined appearance.

'He 's as mad as a March hare,' said he, 'and knows about as much about shooting. He will never get into the Second Class as long as he lives; only one does not like to seem ill-natured. We shall never have to use the green flag, for he never made a bull's-eye in the course of his existence, and I very much doubt if he will ever make "an outer——"'

'What's that?' cried I, as a dull thud on one side of our turf-hut followed the discharge of his first shot.

'Oh, he 's hit our butt instead of the target, that's all,' returned Hippolyte coolly. 'It's quite shot-proof; never fear.'

'But he must be a lunatic,' remonstrated I. 'Why do you let him shoot at all?'

'I can't stop him.—By Jove! how quick he fires; but it will be all the sooner over.—Stop a bit; you mustn't distract an adjutant's attention.—I don't know whether that was a hit or not; I must go out and see.—I suppose he knows that the red flag means Stop Firing.' Hippolyte put out the signal in question, waved it in the usual manner, and then stepped out himself. An instant afterwards there was a sharp crack, and then a bullet whizzed within half an inch of his left ear.

'Goodness gracious,' cried Hippolyte, hastily re-entering his ark of safety; 'that blackguard nearly shot me. It shows he had no *malice prepense*, or else he would not have been so near. But the idea of his disregarding the red flag! Confound his ignorance, I'll have him drummed out of the corps.'

All this time, quite a storm of bullets was hurtling about our ears. If rapid firing, altogether independent of aim, could have insured Mr. O'Shaughnessy's promotion, he would already have been in the second class. Not a single bullet, however, hit the target.

At this moment, a terrible incident occurred: out of the thymy moss-clad seat on which we sat, there flew an

enormous insect with an appalling boom, and began to circle around us. I am not well acquainted with the entomology of the country, and I concluded it to be only a bumble-bee. But I noticed Hippolyte turn pale, and wave the red flag with frantic excitement. At this moment, another bumble-bee flew out, and joined the mazy circles of its predecessors.

‘What a noise these bumble-bees make,’ said I, ‘in this confined space; and I don’t think I ever saw such big ones.’

‘Hush!’ said Hippolyte. ‘Do not enrage them; they are hornets. I have no doubt that we are sitting upon a nest of them!’

Imagine our position, in a diminutive sentry-box, five feet high by four feet wide, tenanted by hornets, and the only means of egress exposed to the murderous fire of a madman.

‘If this reptile stings my nose, it will be double its size in half a minute,’ said Hippolyte, with the calmness of despair.

I knew the poor fellow was thinking of how he could present himself in such a condition to his beloved object. A lady’s lip is none the worse, as the poet tells us, if it does look as though ‘a bee had stung it newly;’ but the case is widely different in respect to a gentleman’s nose and a hornet.

Still, the gallant captain did not lose his presence of mind. ‘If you can find the little hole from which these infernal villains escaped,’ said he, ‘stop it quietly up with your finger, or anything.’

‘Not with my finger, if I know it,’ returned I, endeavouring to pacify the hornet that was devoting itself to me by blowing gently at it; ‘but I will try the handle of my penknife.’

This brilliant idea was executed with the most complete success. There was a noise as of about twelve church organs in the seat beneath us, but it was muffled. The penknife exactly fitted. Agitated, I have no doubt, by the stifled voices of their relatives, the two outside hornets whizzed about us like catherine-wheels. We

dared not move a muscle, except that Hippolyte kept on waving the red flag, which only seemed to have the same effect upon O'Shaughnessy as on some savage bull—namely to excite him to frenzy. He appeared to fire about twenty shots a minute, and all wide ones.

'How many cartridges has the villain got?' enquired I.

'Enough for a twelvemonth,' groaned the adjutant. 'They have put the regimental chest under the walnut-tree.—What time is it? If this unutterable idiot *does* get me late for dinner, I'll wring his neck.'

With the utmost caution, and with an apologetic glance at my hornet, I drew forth my watch. 'We have no time to lose,' said I. 'We have already been here half an hour, and indeed it seems half a day.'

'I'll chance it,' cried Hippolyte, setting his teeth, and gathering himself together for a rush.

'You will be a dead man,' said I, 'if you do. Think of your Margaret, and don't leave a poor fellow alone in this horrid place with a couple of hornets. See, that scoundrel has already put three bullets through the red flag. If you had been there, they would have gone through you instead.'

The argument was unanswerable; Hippolyte gnashed his teeth in impotent rage.

'I am sure,' said I soothingly, 'when old Bullion comes to understand the very peculiar circumstances of our position, he will perceive that punctuality was out of the question. This unmitigated scoundrel, O'Shaughnessy——'

'Arrah, captain jewel, and aint I in class 2 by this time?' ejaculated a querulous voice, and at the aperture of our prison-house appeared the hateful features of our jailer, distorted by an adulatory grin.

To throw the red flag in his face, to leap out of the marker's butt, and fly towards the gate at which the speedy 'weed' was tethered, was but the work of a moment; and the next, Captain Steel was flying across the country in full evening dress, in the direction of his dinner.

As for me, before O'Shaughnessy could recover from his amazement, I had jerked the penknife out of the hole, and was running homeward at full speed, leaving that gallant volunteer surrounded by such a host of infuriated hornets that they seemed to darken the air.

So Captain and Adjutant Hippolyte Steel got in time for dinner and for Margaret, after all.





BLANK'S BIRTHPLACE.



WHEN all that is mortal of me has departed, and only my name and fame are left here below, I do trust that I shall never become the property of a committee. I hope that no company will set themselves to 'work' my memory as they have worked Blank's; I do indeed. It makes me sad to think what his noble spirit must suffer, if it be cognizant of the tribute it receives. A modest shade, like his, must blush to see his native village advertised, throughout the summer months, as the Birthplace of the Immortal Blank. None who can read a hand-bill, and who travel by railway, can possibly be left in doubt that Asterisk *was* his birthplace, 'the home of his boyhood, the occasional residence of his maturer years, and the spot where at last, full of years and honours, he came to pass the evening of life, and eventually to lay his venerable bones.' I quote from the circular issued by the committee, and adopted by the railway company in their advertisements. Every year, excursion-trains are run to his last resting-place 'on and after May 1;' positively the last trip to Asterisk ('dear to every English heart, as being the dwelling-place of Blank') occurs at the end of each October. A reduction of fares (very extensively advertised in the locality) takes place upon every return of his natal-day.

Sooner or later, an advertisement, provided only it be

inserted often enough, is sure to catch you. It is no more to be evaded than death or taxes. One comes to drink Epps's Cocoa before one dies. And thus it was that Brown, Jones, and Robinson came to go to Asterisk last summer in spite of themselves. The two former resent exceedingly publicity, popularity, and everything else which is applauded by the penny papers, but they succumbed to the inevitable. I, who am Robinson, merely went because Brown and Jones went.

Upon the railway ticket was printed in small type after the word Asterisk, Blank's Birthplace ; and, indeed, had it not been his birthplace, Asterisk would not have been a railway station at all. A small branch leaves the main line for the sole and express purpose of doing honour to Blank's memory. The other places at which it stops are savage and remote localities. One of them, I remember, was actually called Wooten-wawen, a name suggestive of the Cannibal Islands. The engine was named 'Blank ;' the tender was appropriately christened after one of the love-poems of that world-renowned author. When we arrived at our journey's end, the railway policeman, as he took our tickets at the gate, politely jerked his head in the direction of Blank's supposed residence ; 'Fust turnin' on the left, and second to the right, gents ; and there's the 'ouse.' I say 'supposed' residence, because it is by no means positively certain that he was ever inside it. Nothing *is* certain about Blank. That truly great and divinely gifted man seems to have been dowered with prescience : to have had a suspicion of what would be done with him after death, and to have purposely destroyed all evidences of his personal identity. There are numberless established theories about Blank, and new ones cropping up every day ; and I should not be surprised if somebody should presently set himself to prove that Blank had never been within fifty miles of Asterisk in his life. Then the committee would of course bring their action, and we should have a chance of getting at something definite by cross-examination. Wise beyond the wisest of all time, Blank never committed himself to paper ; that is, notwithstanding he

was so voluminous a writer, he left no scrap of his own handwriting behind him, except the signature to certain law documents. He was a practical man ; and while taking care that all legal requirements should be satisfied, he made no provision for sentiment whatever. If he ever cut his name on a tree, he cut the tree down afterwards. If he ever sowed it in mustard and cress, he took care to eat the salad. The more I consider this matter, the more I am convinced that Blank had a presentiment of the committee and the branch-line. He actually caused these lines to be written over his grave :

“Blest be y^e man y^t spares these stones,
And curst be he y^t moves my bones.”

Otherwise, we should have had his bones up long ago, and arranged them nicely in a glass case. All the great men that have ever lived since his time (with the exception of George IV.) have come to Asterisk, and written their names wherever they could find room upon the walls of his birth-chamber. His cradle, it is true, is not preserved, but ‘all reason and analogy unite to show’ that this must have been the exact spot where he first saw the light. *The house belonged to his own father*, a statement italicised because attested ; and this was the apartment most probably used for such domestic occurrences. Therefore, when Jones enquired confidentially of the very respectable lady-custodian whether ‘there really was any direct evidence’ of Blank’s having been brought into the world in that particular room, he not only hurt her feelings but flew in the face of the facts. It is due to Brown and myself to say that we at once apologised for this needless and inexcusable barbarity upon the part of our companion, who (we explained) makes money by mathematics. I would not have had her know that he was also a clergyman for twice the value of the admission fee ; for such a confession must have either shaken her faith in the Establishment or in Blank himself. She on her part was sufficiently generous not to make public what had occurred, for otherwise Jones might have been torn to pieces at Asterisk, and sent to Wooten-wawen to be devoured.

If there was nothing in the sacred tenement which had been absolutely Blank's, yet there was much indirectly associated with him ; all the editions of his works, for instance, and almost all the fancy portraits of him. I say fancy portraits advisedly. Blank was the incarnation of fancy, and a very many-featured man. If not, we must come to the conclusion that his sagacious prescience determined to baffle the committee not only in the matter of manuscripts, but also in that of pictures, for there is quite a gallery of them extant and none of them alike. There is also a bust upon his tomb quite different from the pictures. The famous theory of 'undesigned coincidence' is reversed in this case ; and I leave it to the German critics (who have lost themselves again and again in the Blank maze) whether some system of 'designed nonconformity' may not be instituted to explain everything yet. This (I must say) ingenious suggestion has certainly never occurred to the inhabitants of Asterisk itself. They imagine that the more immediately they can identify themselves with their tutelary genius the better. Half of them are Blanks by name. All of them make capital out of Blank. There is the *Blank Arms* open to receive you, and the Blank Distillery to supply it with spirits in which to drink his immortal memory. I regret to add that over a very small establishment in a by-street is an inscription setting forth that superior Blank lemonade is to be procured within at three-halfpence a bottle. It is perfectly sure—whatever else may be obscure about him—that Blank detested lemonade and all such 'wish-wash,' and has therefore no sort of connection with this establishment. I noticed also 'Blank Dips' very prominently advertised ; whereas we have evidence to prove that Blank patronised the oil called 'midnight oil,' and not dips.

At the inn already alluded to, there is religiously preserved a parlour, a chair, and even a poker, once made use of, not indeed actually by Blank, but by a gentleman of literary reputation who came to worship at his shrine during the present century. Jones, always sceptical (except of course with respect to professional matters), in-

dulged in fits of mirth over these sacred relics. The words 'Wiggle's Poker' inscribed upon that article affected him to tears of laughter. For my part, I never saw so disgraceful an exhibition; but Brown rather encouraged him than otherwise; and when the imperturbable waiting-maid brought in a cold Blank pie, I thought they would both have choked over it. It was market-day, and the windows were open, and I was really alarmed lest we should become objects of popular vengeance. It would be in vain, I knew, to attempt to convince the good people that Brown and Jones revered Blank at heart most cordially, and indeed resented the local absurdities committed in his name upon that very account; with the Asteriskites, the exact contrary was the case; they had probably never read a line of his works; but they believed in the poker business implicitly. We should certainly be put to death, if our lives depended upon our explanation of the matter being understood by them; and I besought my friends to moderate their transports, until at least we had got on to the main line of railway. But they only made dumb motions towards the pie and the poker, and gasped and gurgled in reply. This was not a frame of mind in which to seek out the other associations of the place; and I took them to the church at once, in hopes to sober them. 'There, at least,' thought I, 'Jones is sure to conduct himself with propriety, and even Brown will probably abstain from ribaldry.' But by this time there had grown up in both my companions an unreasonable but most virulent antipathy to everything relating to the local lion. They murmured against me; protested that they would not stand anything more (as though they had treated me to luncheon, which they had not); and expressed a vehement desire to leave 'the blessed place' [I use Brown's words], 'and have done with it,' although there was so much more yet to be seen. In the churchyard—to give you an idea of Brown's state of mind—I stopped a moment, and observed (I think impressively): 'Well, it at least is certain that Blank must have looked with his own eyes at this very edifice at which we ourselves are now gazing!'

'And who the deuce cares whether he did or not?' was the brutal reply.

Even Jones was shocked at this, and called Brown to order for using in such a locality the word 'deuce;' upon the meaning and derivation of which so sharp a controversy ensued between them, that Brown walked straight back again to the inn, declaring that he had left his umbrella there, which was of more value to him than any Blankean association whatever, and, moreover, genuine. The last word, in particular, he pronounced with a most fiendish emphasis, accompanied with an unseemly wink; and so we parted, Jones and I to church, Brown to the alehouse—a type, perhaps (if I did but possess Blank's genius to convey it), of our respective lives.

After the church, there was Blank's other house to be explored, which is Asterisk's rival attraction to the birthplace. The latter, as has been shown, is in good preservation, and has everything fitting about it, except direct evidence of Blank's having been born there; the other mansion was most undoubtedly once his residence, but unfortunately nothing of the original tenement remains. Do I say nothing? Let me not do Asterisk and the committee wrong. There are half-a-dozen large stones placed under cucumber-frames—and, indeed, I really thought they *were* cucumbers—which are said to be the ORIGINAL FOUNDATIONS.

While Jones and I were regarding these interesting relics, and especially their glass cases, with unfeigned admiration, and expressing our pity for poor Brown, whose unhappy temper had caused him to miss them, a polite individual came from the house and invited us to walk in. It had not been exactly Blank's residence, he admitted, but it had been always allowed to stand upon a portion of the very spot where that edifice had stood: even looked upon in that light, the house had naturally possessed a surpassing interest for all to whom the name of Blank was dear; but something had been discovered of late—within a few days, in fact, of our present visit—which, it was not too much to say, would delight the civilised world.

We were fortunate in being among the first five hundred persons who had been privileged to witness it. It had been brought to light by the merest accident — one of those trifles upon which so often hang affairs of the gravest moment : but there it was.

‘But what *is* it, my good Sir?’ enquired Jones.

‘You must see the house first,’ returned the polite individual, ‘you will find *that* not without an interest of its own; and last and best of all, you shall be made acquainted with THE GREAT DISCOVERY.’

With palpitating hearts, we accordingly followed our conductor. My own impression was that Blank's private study had been discovered—his chosen place for composition—in the most satisfactory state of preservation, and containing his favourite desk, perhaps with an unfinished manuscript in it. Jones pictured to himself some equally attractive spectacle. In the meantime, we traversed room after room, which, if they had ‘an interest of their own,’ had certainly none for us, and ascended stair after stair until we reached an attic chamber.

‘Be prepared,’ said the polite individual in a solemn voice. ‘It was here that the secret was discovered.’

There was nothing in the room whatever; but at the further end of it was a wooden partition, with apparently a couple of cupboards in it.

With a stately motion of the hand, we were waved towards these recesses. ‘They have been made,’ explained our conductor, ‘expressly for the accommodation of the public, in order that more than one person might be gratified at the same time.’

With trembling hands, Jones and myself each opened a cupboard, and reverently looked within. If we had been less respectful, we should have run our heads against a brick-wall that was within a foot or so of the apertures.

‘I can see nothing,’ complained Jones; and indeed it was almost pitch dark.

‘Do you not see a wall before you?’ enquired our conductor, with the air of a man who has a great treat in store.

‘Yes, I see *a wall*,’ said Jones discontentedly.

'You are now beholding the veritable original GABLE END of Blank's own house,' said the polite individual. 'It was discovered only a few days back, when we were making some alterations in the premises.'

Although it was dark in the cupboard, Jones and I could see one another inside it by means of the light behind us, and unheheld by our conductor, we now exchanged glances of indescribable meaning. My friend was purple, and his shoulders were convulsed with a perfect paroxysm of mirth. I knew that if he moved, he must needs burst into roar after roar of inextinguishable laughter, which would be very embarrassing to the polite individual whose invited guests we were. There was nothing for it, therefore, but for us both to remain in our ridiculous positions. No doubt attributing our delay to satisfaction at the spectacle afforded to us, our host proceeded: 'In consequence of this remarkable and unprecedented discovery of the gable end, a national subscription is about to be set on foot to secure it in perpetuity for the British public. A shilling apiece is accordingly demanded ——'

'What!' exclaimed Jones, withdrawing from the aperture a countenance suddenly sobered by the threat of pecuniary exaction. 'You don't mean to say you are going to charge for looking at a dead wall?'

'The original gable end of the house of the immortal Blank, Sir,' returned the polite individual with dignity, 'can scarcely be considered to be a dead wall.'

We paid our shillings, and departed from this interesting edifice without further remonstrance.

'It is this sort of thing,' observed I philosophically,

'Which makes it seem more sweet to be
The little life of bank and brier,
The bird that pipes his lone desire,
And dies unheard within his tree,

'Than he that warbles long and loud,
And drops at Glory's temple-gates,
For whom the carrion vulture waits,
To tear his heart before the crowd.'

‘Just so,’ returned Jones. ‘It is a satisfaction to reflect, that when you and I are gone, Robinson, *our* gable ends will not be similarly exhibited. However, here is the railway station, and Brown with his recovered umbrella. We must take care to impress him with the idea that we have been enchanted with what he has missed.’

But we found Brown not at all impressionable upon this point; and when we pressed him at least to promise some pecuniary help towards the national subscription for purchasing Blank's original gable end, he gave impassioned utterance to the following reply: ‘No, I'll not do that; but I tell you *what* I'll do: I am ready to give a good round sum towards bursting up the whole concern.’ By which we understood him to mean not only the gable end, but Asterisk and the committee, the branch-line, the chair and poker, and all the rest of the exhibition.

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